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PLACES OF WORSHIP AN PILGRIMAGE IN ASSAM

VIVEKANANDA KENDRA, GUWAHATI

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PLACES OF WORSHIP AND PILGRIMAGE IN ASSAM

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Our cover : Fakuwa Dol near the Hayagriva-Madhava temple, built by the Ahóm King Pramatta Singha (1744-51). The peculiar architectural form shows it as a class by itself and is an indigeneous innovation in contrast to the common Indo-aryan class. (p-7).

Photograph courtesy—Directorate of Archaeology.

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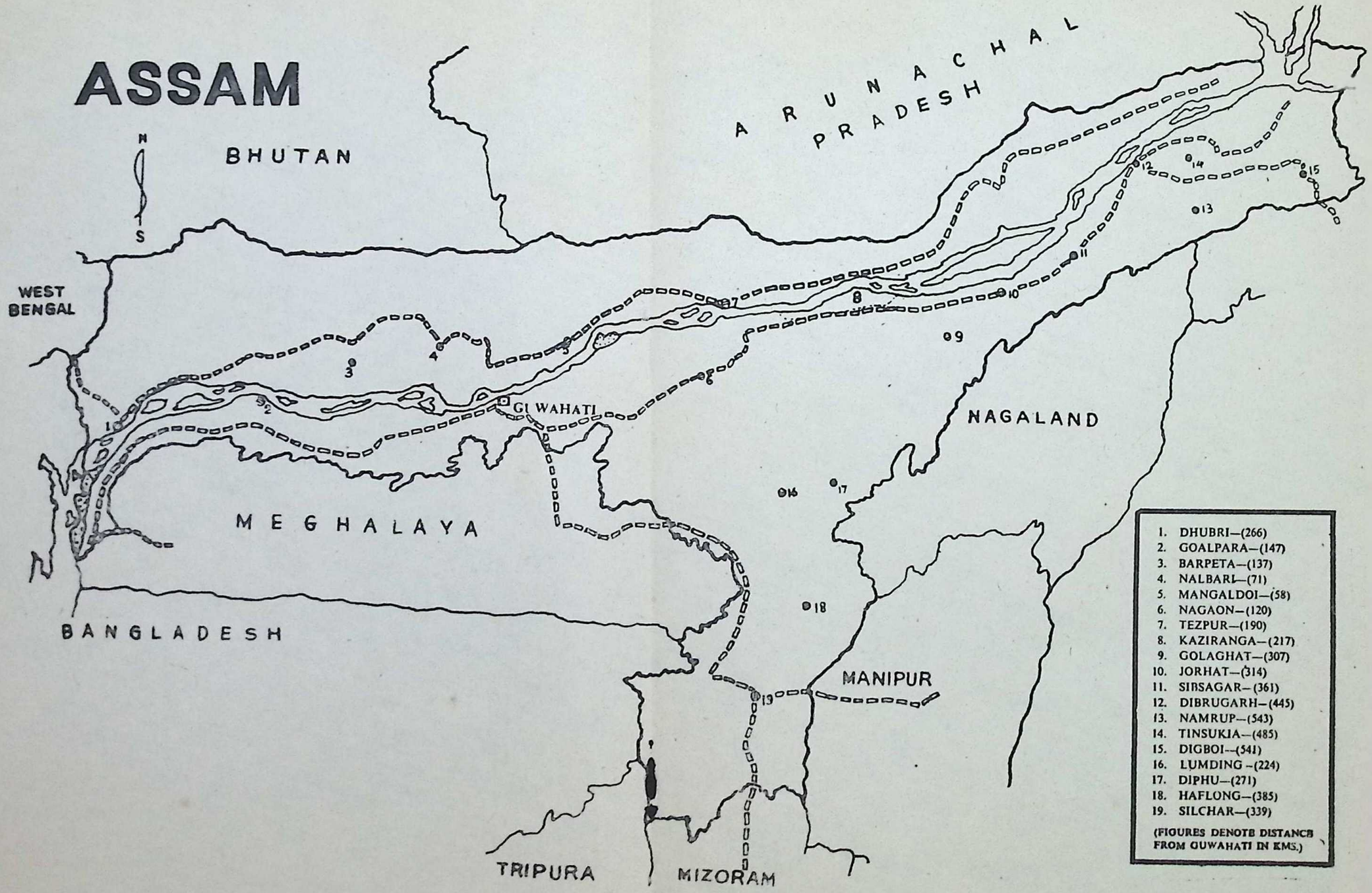
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(FIGURES DENOTE DISTANCE FROM GUWAHATI IN KMS.)

The Editor's Say

It is not easy to determine from what precise time the meaning of the term 'Dharma' had started tapering down to the present day concept. The term no longer means **'dharamad dharmamityahurdharmo dharayate prajah :** ('Mbh. Karna 57/69) ; 'because it upholds, it is called dharma ; Dharma upholds the creation' The term had never meant the easily accepted English version 'Religion'.

The Vedas, the fountainhead of almost all religious tenets of Hinduism referred to 'Dharma' in the First Book of Rig-Veda : **'Trini pada vi cakrame Vishnurgopa adabhyah ato dharmani dharayan'.** (1-21-18). **'Kim kurban'** (What was done ?), Sayana asked in explaining **'Dharmani, agnihotradini dharayan poshayan'** ; the dharmas, the sacrificers were held together and protected. The **'agnihotradini'** and **'poshayan'** were Sayana's expansions. H. H. Wilson termed the **'dharmani'** as 'righteous acts', while Griffith translated the Ric to mean 'Established his high decrees'.

The plurality is obvious. The pastoral society of the vedic times were given norms and ways of life. Disciplines were prescribed. Down the ages, these were interpreted and re interpreted, variously arranged through the sutras, upanishads, the epics, the puranas and of course, Manu. In the Indian context, these remained unbroken and are still continuing, thus giving Hinduism an unparalleled continuity and universality. That is the magic of Hinduism, the magic that 'lies in the imperishable and unconquerable spirit contained in the original documents-the vedas'.

The concept of a Creator of All—the universe, the sun the moon, the sky, the stars, rains, vegetation, the periodicity and regularity of celestial movements, so also of the seasons on earth and the entire living world came to occupy the human mind. The awe-inspiring powers of the Creator led mankind to think of propitiating the Almighty.

Acknowledge the creator, marvel at His might, pay Him all your respects and sing His praises : for 'In the beginning rose Hiranyagarbha, born Only Lord of all created beings. He fixed and holdeth up this earth and heaven. What God shall we adore with our oblation ? ' (Rig. V.10/121-1 Tr. Griffith.)

The same adoration rings familiar in other younger world religions. Compare this : 'O mankind : worship your Lord Who hath created you and those before you so that ye may ward off (evil). Who hath appointed the earth a resting-place for you and the sky a canopy.' (Holy Quoran, 2/21-22 : Tr. Marmaduke Pickthal).

Rituals, then, were thought of and devised. The first one referred to in vedas again, was **'yajna'**, offering libations to the sacrificial fire. It was also mostly a domestic affair, growing around a family fire. 'There is no mention of any temple, or any reference to a public place of worship ..... 'in the Vedas.

The yajna was later given the form of a public ritual. Seasonal and political rituals took shape in the yajnas called 'Aswamedha.and 'rajasuya'.

The continuation of this ritual gave rise to the necessity of finding a class of people 'the knowers of the vedas', to carry on the rituals with appropriate ceremonies. 'When in later times', quipped Dr. Abinash Ch.Bose, 'the vedic language became obsolete and the meaning could not be properly understood, the formal character of the Yajna became very much pronounced. ' (The Call of the Vedas -p.63)

The yajnas gradually widened their scope to include other forms of worship. other forms of oblations and more important, the Almighty himself was divided into a plethora of divinities. Shapes and forms of God came to be conceived.

It were the two epics, and more particularly the puranas, that found various forms of the Divinity and extolled their glories.

Myths and mythology cropped up into branches and found the Gods with families, sons and daughters.

With this plurality of deities, forms of devotion also became manifold. The scriptures described and explained what places could be most sacred for which manifestation of God and what form of worship could be most pleasing to Him.

The non-conformist spark of Vedic light, Buddhism, is said to have renounced rituals and metaphysics, but gave to India features like temples and image worship.

The Indus civilisation gave us possibly the first icon; that of the protector of animals 'Pashupati' in the yoga pose. This God, later came to be identified with Siva. The pose aside, the form was that of a human being. Other Gods were also conceived in the form of a man, but to attribute qualities superior to an ordinary man, Gods were given more hands, more eyes or decorated with materials that may inspire instant awe and reverence (**dasabhuja, chaturvhuja, trinayana,** necklaces of snakes or human heads, adorned with tirger skin and the like.)

Compare again: 'And God said let us make man in our image, after our likeness: .(Genesis 1.26) was what Bible contemplated.

Gods that have the powers of inducing fear were conceived of having a combination of man-animal forms, an animal's head on a human body, a human torso over animl limbs, a human torso with a snakes tail and were all revered with supplication and worshipped with related ceremony.

When divinities were thus separated and adored, places for their installation had to be found out. Every house-hold, keeping with the vedic tradition of domestic oblations, used to have a secluded place for daily prayers and worship. Places of worship, where a whole community could offer prayers and oblations, were thought of and planned.

Such places were treated as most sacred to a creed and visits thereto came to be a part of devotion.

The fire worshipping Parsis, who follow the rituals of the worship almost in the lines of a vedic sacrifice, down to the use of 'Homa' juice comparable to 'Soma' juice, the sacred grass 'Barsom' comparable to the 'Kusa' grass, 'Darum' comparable to 'purodash' or the pan-cake, ghee and butter, believe the place of worship or a temple as the 'first' most pleasing spot on earth. 'Creator', it was asked in the

Avesta, 'of the settlements supplied with creatures, righteous one : where is the first most pleasing (spot) of this earth ? Then said Ahuramazda : wherein indeed, a righteous man shall pray, O Spitama Zarathushtra ! holding the firewood, holding the Barsom, holding the milk-offering (gaush-jivya), holding the Homa mortar. (Tr. Martin Haug-The Parsis : p 315)

Jacob, in Bible, declared : 'and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. ('Genesis : 28.22)

Compare again : 'And when we made the House (at Mecca) a resort for mankind and a sanctuary (saying) : Take as your place of worship the place where Abraham stood (to pray). And We imposed a duty upon Abraham and Ishmael. (saying) Purify My House for those who go around and those who meditate therein and those who bow down and prostrate themselves (in worship)'. '(Holy Quoran-Tr. M. Pickthal : 2/125).

Rulers, kings and emperors came to play the most significant role in building temples and facilities for pilgrims. Many of the scriptures ordained that a good king should do these as a part of their regal functions.

The Bhagavat Purana prescribed open fields. market places, towns and villages for building of 'firm temples' (**mandiram karayet dridham**) with beautiful flower gardens surrounding them. (**puspodyanani ramyani pujayatrotsavashritan** : (11/27-50,51)

Accessory practices for devotion were approved and encouraged in the puranas. Pilgrimages to holy waters were prescribed. The Mahabharata has devoted several chapters describing and extolling holy rivers and places of pilgrimages in India. All the rivers, so described, are life-givers to all people, irrespective of caste and creed (**arya mlecchah ca.**), and all the rivers are like a mother to the masses and give away maximum of wealths (**viswasya matarah sarvah sarvaccaiva mahafalah** : Bhisma 37/9)

The Kalika Purana gives details of such rivers in Assam and her neighbourhood. Pilgrimages to these rivers and a holy dip therein, the Purana assures. not only cleanses one of sins, some will even free one from the bonds of re-birth as a mortal human being.

This Purana also gives extensive details of places of worship with the description of the presiding deities thereof. Methods of worship, oblations to be offerred and 'mantra's to be chanted are also detailed there. The Purana, however, covers mostly details pertaining to Shakti worship and dwells on the exploits of the tantric goddesses. In one verse, it specifies what offerings are to be made to the deity Tikshnakanta. There should be 'modaka' coconut, wine, cooked curry, sugar-cane and surely a human sacrifice : **panesu madira shasta, naro balisu parthiva, modaka narikelan ca mamsavyanjanamaikshyabam, naibedyesu priyakarah tikshnayah parikirtita. (51/80)**

Places of worship gained more and more popularity with the introduction of music, dance and drama as added forms of devotation. Hajo, Dergaon, Dubi are still known for temple dancers. For somnath temple 'The shrine had 10,000 villages for its maintenance, had 1,000 Brahmins to perform the rituals specially at the time of eclipses, 300 musicians and dancing girls to sing and dance at the temple gates. 300 barbers to shave thr pilgrims and a large staff of couriers to bring daily fresh flowers from Kashmir to garland the idol and fresh Ganga water to wash it with.'

(Somnatha-the Shrine Eternal : p122).

The multiplication of cults and diversification of the forms of worship, divided the mankind itself into myriads of groups, each claiming a distinct and independent school of culture and philosophy; though in fact none has so far come out of the faith in One Supreme Being that blesses the universe.

Assam and its several neighbours are said to be later entrants into vedic tradition. The epics and the puranas traced this area well within geographical periphery of Bharata, and vastly treated it as one giving birth to and nourishing the cults of tantra mainly.

Places of worship were built here too and earned similar respect and devotion. Several of such places are so antequated that known history is obscure about their origin.

The most famous of them all is the Kamakhya temple at Guwahati. The commonly known myth and legend traces its establishment to the age of Daksha performing a yajna. But that yajna and its aftermath finds a locale each at different parts of the country.

The Mahavairav temple at Tezpur is one such. The establishmeut of this temple is credited to Banasura of the Mahabharata age, precisely the Krishna era. It is interesting to note that this Bana with his capital city of Sonitpura is again located at several places.

The Bhagavat Purana refers to it thus : 'Sonitakhye pure ramye sa rajyamakarotpura' ..... (10-62.4). No reference to its exact geographical location is given. K. M. Munshi takes this place to the Arabian sea-shore by implication. 'Banasura, the father of the bride of Shri Krishna's grandson, had something to do with Assyria ; Sonitpura, his capital, has the same meaning as 'Babylon, —the City of Blood'. This is not a mere accident. Panchajanyasura, from whom Shri Krishna saved the son of His teacher Sandipani who had been dragged into the sea at Prabhasa, might have been an Assyrian trader who had kidnapped the boy.' (Somnatha The Shrine Eternal : p 7).

Horace H. Wilson had something more to say in this regard, in his translation of the Vishnu Purana, 'The synonyms of Sonitpura in the Trikanda Sesha are Devikota, Banapur, Kotivarsham, and Ushavana. The first is usually considered to be the modern Devicotta in the Karnatic, which is commonly believed to be the scene of Bana's defeat. The name, however, occurs in other parts of India ; in the Dekhin on the banks of the Godavari. according to Wilford the capital of Munja : and in Assam, near Goalpara, as the city of the Daityas. Hamilton notices the remains of a city so called in Dinajpur. In the Kalika P. Bana is described as the friend, and apparently neighbour, of Naraka, king of Pragjyotish or Assam.' (Note 1 : Chap. XXXIII, P—467 Feb. 1840)

Remains in ruins of a city are still there at Tezpur. The stone structures and stone sculptures cannot lie, and alas, cannot talk too ! They bear evidence, of the existence, sometime in the unknown past, of some skilled artisans, stone cutters, a patron, in all probability in a king, a faithful devotee (of Siva in the case of Bana in all the sites stated) and an ethnic group of followers or worshippers of the deity. This is true for all the places where ruins are found associated with similer myths and legends ; except for the difference in the types of the handiwork or the school of art. Who

then, were the specific authors of these works ? Myths migrated and transmigrated, never leaving traces of their origin. 'The worship of Shiva and His consort Shakti dates from prehistoric times....' says Munshi. So the ruins are of pre-historic constructions. Put any names and weave a myth around it. People will remain satisfied and content.

It has been our endeavour to trace and describe all the existing places of worship in Assam. History, antiquity and where possible, the school of axchitecture have been detailed here in respect of the old temples and shriness by two very eminent experts on the subject, Shri Bhuyan and Shri Sarma, both belonging to the Department of Archaeology. I am extremely grateful to both of them for compiling the article for us.

Assam fared prominently in the vaishnava movement that engulfed the entire country round about the fifteenth century. Two great reformer saints, Shri Sankardeva and Shri Madhavdeva, brought about a total change in the religious atmosphere of this region through there teachings. A subdued, serene and glamourless form of devotion pervaded the entire community, religious tolerance, being at the top of the changed outlook.

A new thought. a new school of devotion, a new form of prayer and worship emerged. Places of prayer also took a new simple look. The study thereof is a challenge in itself. Shri Naren Kalita has taken it up and you can see he has met with glorious success, My grateful thanks are due to him too.

Dr. Satyendranath Sarma, ex-president of Asam Sahitya Sabha and formerly of the Gauhati University hardly needs an introduction. His study of the Satra institution has immensely enriched this work for which too I shall remain grateful to him.

The Vivekananda Kendra is an institution dedicated for the service of man and is well known all over the country, It has, in its works and schemes, abundantly shown that to serve man is to serve God, The realisation 'When they had fused the mortal man complete, the Gods entered into him (**sarvam sansiccya martya devah purushamabishan**: Atharva Veda: 11-8.13),is amply reflected in the Kendra's tasks, past and present and plans of the future.

I am indeed indebted to the Kendra for trusting me with this job. I would have but, failed miserably, had it not been for Shri Satish Kamath, the Kendra's spirit at Guwahati.

We are aware of our limitations and do realise that what is presented here is but only a fraction of what is available both in material and words. The compilation could not be extended beyond this. We offer our apologies to all our esteemed readers.

Atulananda Goswami

TEMPLES AND HOLY SHRINES OF ASSAM

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Department of Archaeology, Assam

THE STATE OF ASSAM, especially the Brahmaputra valley, was once littered with a plethora of temples, brick-built as well as stone-built, as the existing ruins scattered all over the State show, all of which belonged to the period prior to the 13th century. All the existing temples however, belong to the period posterior to this dividing line (with a solitary exception) when the Ahom in the East and the Koches in the West gradually rose to power sandwiching the Kacharis and the local Bhuyan chiefs in between and subsequently driving out the Kacharis to the Barak valley region in the South and absorbing the petty Bhuyan chiefs in their expanding kingdoms. The climatic conditions of this region, which is extremely humid and the perennial flood, frequent earthquakes and heavy rainfall are responsible for the destruction of the pre-thirteenth century temples. The existing post-thirteenth century temples are of late mediaeval vintage, built between the 16th and the 18th centuries under the patronage of the Koch, the Ahom and the Kachari royal dynasties and the building fervours reached its peak during the reign of King Rajeswara Singha (1751-69 AD). A fairly large number of these were built over the ruins of the pre-thirteenth century temples, sometimes using structural components of these ruins sparingly. Almost all these temples are brick-built, with a few exceptions in which stones, either new or salvaged from older temples, were used. Some of these temples have been entirely abandoned, while others are still living.

Yet another variety of holy places are those where modern temple structures, either of bamboo and thatched roof, or wood and C I sheet roof, or brick and cement concrete, have been raised over the ruins of the ancient and not so very ancient temples.

As the reader will find for himself, these temples and shrines belonged to different sects and a statistical denominational evaluation and sectarial compartmentalisation of these is not in order since a temple or a shrine may sometimes be equally shared by devotees of these different sects and a royal builder or patron, while professing, for instance Saktism was never chary of showing equal devotion to other deities and never stinted his patronage to them, which is indicative of the atmosphere of religious toleration prevailing during those days. Instances of religious persecution, though are there, but these were basically motivated or were perpretated on personal grounds, not based on sectarian connections. This is generally true of the entire historical period of this State, more particularly of the post-13th century period, which is a well-documented period, thanks to the Ahom custom of writing chronicles which are authentic and reliable.

We now begin our pilgrimage from the Western border of Assam where the river Brahmaputra curves down to slice through Bangladesh and, proceeding along either bank of the river, take turn towards South-west to the Barak valley and terminate our odessey at Bhuban-pahar, North-east of Silchar in the Cachar district.

1. KAMAKHYA THAAN : MANKACHAR

Mankachar is a small township on the south-west border of the Dhubri district and is contiguous to the Indo-Bangladesh border. Though mainly a river-built area, it also cortains a small range of hillocks, over which a few spots of historical and religious importance are located, the most important of which are the grave of Mirjumla, a late mediaeval general of Bengal, and the Kamakhya temple. It is 270 km west of Guwahati and is linked by daily State Transport bus service.

The Kamakhya Thaan is held in high esteem by the local Hindus and those living in the neighbourhood. Popular belief of the area regards it as one of the 50 pithas of Puranic fame. During the time of Durga Puja and Ambubaci, the place witnesses heavy congregation of visitors.

2. MAHAMAYA THAAN : BAGARIBARI.

Bagaribari is an insignificant roadside township on the highway connecting Guwahati and Dhubri. The Bagaribari Circle Office lies about two Kilometres south of the highway and the Mahamaya Thaan is situated roughly half a Kilometre north of it. The nearest township is Bilasipara, a few kilometeres west.

This Pitha is regarded by the believers as the greatest of the Saktipithas of the district. Established on a nicely located hillock, the very look of the temple is indicative of a healthy management. The presiding deity is an amorphous rock regarded as the Mother Goddess Mahamaya. During the British Rule, the establishment was managed by the Zamindar of the Parvatjowar estate. At present it is under the management of a committee. The establishment does not contain anything of archaeological interest. All the structures there, including the temple,

are entirely modern in construction.

3. ABHAYAPURI DEVALAYA.

Abhayapuri, the old Capital of the royal-estate of Bijni, is roughly 200 km west of Guwahati. It is linked by State Transport. The Abhayadevi Devalaya is situated within the old reside tial campus of the royalty.

The temple contains a metallic image of Durga. Both Durga Puja and Basanti Puja are celebrated here with pomp and ceremony.

4. GANESH MANDIR : ABHAYAPURI.

The Ganesh mandir is situated at Lalmati, a village five kilometres west of Abhayapuri.

The premises of the Ganesh Mandir contains a complex of three temples with a common Namghar in front. All the temples and the Namghar are buildings of impermanent nature and made of C.I. sheets and timber. A new temple in brick a·d R.C.C. is now in progress. The temple contains images of Ganesha, Siva and Visnu respectively. All the images are in stone and were salvaged from the ruins of a 12th century temple existing in the premises.

A vast area around the temple complex consist of a flat and vacant land and a part of it has been used for growing crops which serves as a source of income for the temple management. About twenty villages from the neighbourhood are associated with this management.

The Varada Chaturdashi is observed he e as the biggest festival and a fair is held there on this occasion.

As said above, the site also contains the ruins of an old stone temple, the plinth of which has remained intact. The structural componen s, including the door-frames, show that the temple was thoroughly decorated. The ruins are under the protection of the Department of Archaeology, Assam.

5. TUKRESWARI DEVALAYA : KRISHNAI.

Tukreswari is about 130 km west of Guwahati and 20 km south east of Goalpara, headquarter of the district, just beside the South Trunk Road.

Tukreswari is a steep hillock, about 50 metres high, if not more. A local lege d credits its establishment to a commoner, Tukura by name, who is said to have discovered the sanctity of the spot on the rocky top of the hillock, after whom the deity is named. The feudal lord of the State of Bijni gave his patronage in the construction of the temple atop the hillock. As the peak of the hillock is completely covered by a huge rock formation, the temple has been constructed by driving iron pegs into the rocks. The temple structure is made of iron-frame and galvanised iron sheets. The courtyard in front of the temple is precariously positioned, with precipitous edges. One can, however, enjoy the breathtakings cenic beauty of the plains extending to the horizon down below,

The path leading to the top is so steep that at certain places iron ladders have been placed to enable the pilgrim to scale huge boulders. The hill also contains a few other holy spots. Durga Puja and Vasanti Puja are the principal

festivals associated with the main temple, when the place witnesses a big fair. It is considered by the local people to be one of the Sakti Pithas of Puranic fame.

A major attraction of this temple is the horde of monkeys that live there permanently and partake of the prasadas, along with their human counterparts, regularly. What attracts the visitors is the rare discipline these simian horde observe. The prasada must be taken by the monkey king and his consort first. Then only will the others lay their hands on it. It is said that during the time of the Bijni Raja, prasada was offered to the royal simian couple in silver trays. As the present temple committee cannot afford to serve the monkeys, well, only a few dozen half-fed monkeys now survive there.

6. SHRI SURYA PAHAR TIRTHA.

Surya Pahar is the name of a small range of hill, about 14 kilometres south-west of Goalpara, the district headquarters. It is linked by a motorable road.

On the northern foothills of the Surya Pahar, and covering a length of 100 metres or so, objects of great archaeological interest can be noticed. Further east, two rock-cut images of Jaina Tirthankaras hewn out on the inside wall of a natural cave can be seen. To the west of this cave can be seen a few monolithic votive Stupas cut out of natural rocks in situ. To the extreme west, there is an enclave containing a frieze of Siva and Visnu mages in standing posture with a 12 handed figure (Avalokitesvara ?) on a natural boulder at its back. At different levels of elevation in the hill here, rock-cut Stupas and Sivalingas can be seen. The site also contains a few rock-cut cubical caverns, some of them with monlithic Sivalingas inside them. On the plains to the north of this range is enshrined under a C.I. sheet shed a stone-piece carved with twelve Adityas in a circle, from which the name of the hill is derived. The antiquity of the ruins go back to about 8th century A. D. and later.

Though regular worship is not performed, the place witnesses a big festival accompanied by a fair on the fullmoon day of the month of Magha, when devotees in huge numbers assemble here from far and wide.

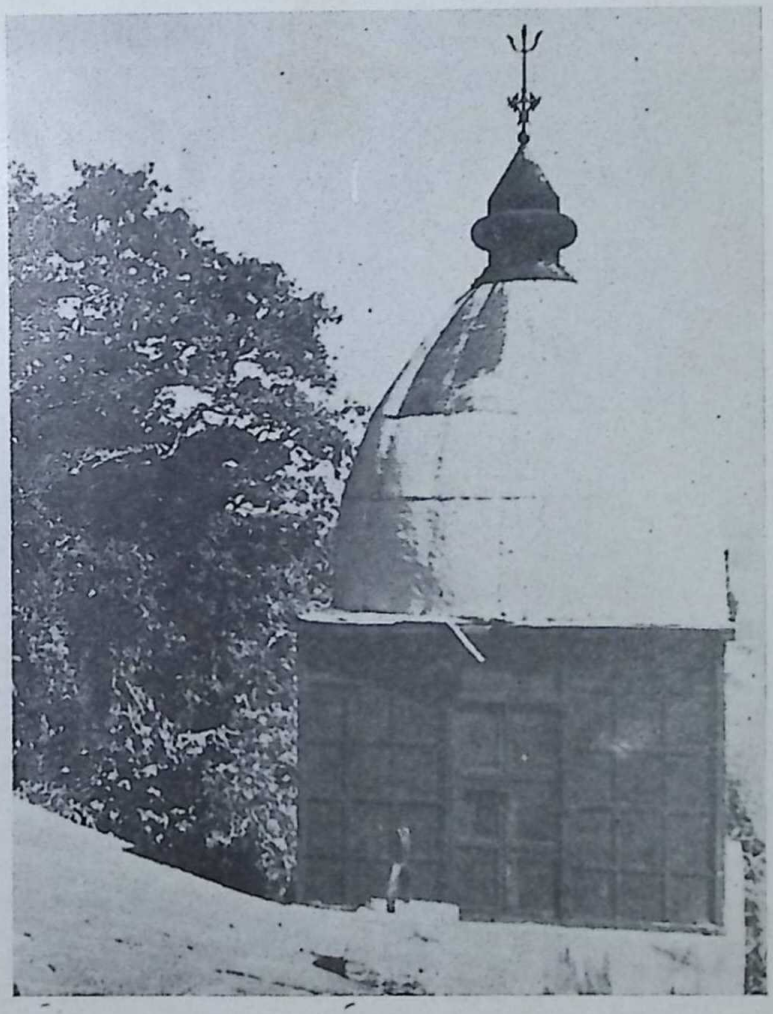
7. PARIHARESWAR DEVALAYA.

This Devalaya is situated at the village Dubi near the township of Pathsala. Pathsala is connected with Guwahati by transport bus facilities, both Govt. and private, as well as by railways.

Dubi is famous for the discovery here of the earliest Copper-Plate charter of Assam. Its antiquity as a religious place goes back to the time of the Ahom king Siva Singha (A.D. 1714-1744). The deities here consist of a Sivalinga and the metallic image of Durga. The Durga Puja is celebrated here with pomp and ceremony. It is also visited by daily worshippers and goat, duck etc. are often sacrificed by them in the name of the Devi.

8. BILVESWAR DEVALAYA.

Belsor, a corrupt form of Bilveswara is a small town about eight kilometres south-west of Nalbari. It is linked by a gravel road. Road transport, both private and Govt., are available from Guwahati, Nalbari and Barpeta.



TUKRESWARI TEMPLE, Krishnai in Goalpara District

(Page-3)

HAYAGRIVA MADHAVA TEMPLE, Hajo in Kamrup District, built in about 10th/12th Century. (P-6/7)

Bilveswar is a Siva temple. It is said to have been built by the King Nagaksha of unknown genealogy. A stone inscription on the temple premises proves that grants of land to this temple were made by the Ahom King Siva Singha (A. D. 1714-1744).

It is a small brick-built temple of North Indian style, with four Mandapas. The outer walls of the temple contain large and uncouth terracotta sculptures of modern make. The floors of the Mandapas along with the Garbhagriha which is at a lower level than the mandapas, remain submerged in water almost throughout the year due to the raising of the ground level around the temple.

At present, a Manikuta along with a spacious Mandapa have been constructed adjoining the old temple. In addition to daily visitors, Sivaratri and Durga Pujas are celebrated here with pomp and ceremony.

9. KALI MANDIR : BALILECHA,

Balilecha is roughly 5 kilometres south of Nalbari. It is connected with Nalbari by a motorable road.

Balilecha contains a few brick temples of the late mediaeval period none of which however, survives. The present temples are modern.

As a centre of pilgrimage Balilecha is very popular. It is daily visited by devotees, whose numbers increase on Tuesdays and Saturdays. It is a Sakti Devalaya and animal and birds are sacrificed here. The Lakshmi, Kali, Saraswati Pujas etc. are performed here annually, on appropriate days. A big fair is held here in the month of Magha, when dramatic performances and operas are staged.

10. TEMPLES AT HAJO.

Hajo is a small town on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and is about 30 km away from Guwahati. It is linked with Guwahati by a well-pitched road.

The topography of Hajo and its neighbourhood is flat but interspersed with a few hills, the highest peak of which contains a Muslim shrine known as the Poamecca (i.e. one fourth of Mecca). The hills around Hajo form a large crescent, the cusp of which contains the town and as such, unlike Kamakhya, the sites of temples atop the hills are mostly scattered and situated at a distance from one another.

Apart from the living temples, the neighbourhood of Hajo contains a number of objects of legendary importance, such as, a big stone bowl assigned to Bhima, a Vrisava in stone, 'fossilised' chunk of butter fallen from Buddha's hand while he was about to die here, as the local legend goes. The washing platform of Netai Dhubuni, the washer-woman, of the legendary episode of Beula-Lakshmindar so popular in Assam, etc. The temples also carry interesting legends, some of which are associated with historical facts.

I) HAYAGRIVA-MADHAVA TEMPLE.

Hajo is particularly famous for the existence of this temple. Situated picturesquely on a small hill, Manikuta by name, the temple is connected with the foot of the hill by a wide and massively constructed stone stairway flanked by two brick ramparts

on either of its sides. A tank full of big fishes exists at the foot of the hillock and just near the beginning of the stairway, which attracts visitors in general who offer eatables to the fishes both for fun and also as a part of pious deeds done in their pilgrimage. Needless to mention, fishing is forbidden here.

HAYAGRIVA as described in the Kalikapurana :

Manikutacale visnurhayagriva svarupadhrik
satabyama pramanena vistarenaiba sovitam. 78/80

—Visnu is extant there on the Manikuta hill in the form of Hayagriva. The place, beautiful as it is, is spread over a hundred 'byama' (byama— measure of the distance from finger-tip to finger-tip of the extended arms of a man)

The Hayagriva-Madhava temple is probably the most popular Vaisnava temple of yore in the entire State of Assam. The site contains two temples, the Visnu temple and a peculiar structure known as the Fakuwa Dol. The Visnu temple contains evidences of several phases, the earliest being of circa 10th-12th century A.D. The elephant friezes used as caryatids at the foot of this temple resemble those existing in the famous Kailash temple of Ellora and medi eval temples of northern and eastern India. Stone components of old buildings, some with carvings, can be seen scattered in the area ; and most of the stone blocks used for the construction of the huge stairway, built during the late mediaeval period, appears to have been salvaged from the ruins at the site. The present temple structure is the work of the Koch king Raghudeva (A. D. 1581-1603) who caused it to be reconstructed in A. D. 1583. The ruins show that the temples of the earlier phases were typically Indo-Aryan in style, the outer walls of which were studded with numerous sculptures and designs, At least in one of the above phases, probably in the 12th century if not later, a pillared Mandapa of massive proportions was built, one of the decorative pillar-capitals from which can still be seen lying in front of the present Namghar. The present temple, though it bears old sculptures, does not seem to be an exact replica of the older one. The Mandapa attached to the Vimana also bears definite signs typical of the age of its reconstruction.

The sanctum-sanctorum of the temple enshrines the image of Hayagriva-Madhava and also a few other images. such as, a second Madhava, Garuda, Vasudeva etc.

The Bhutanese Buddhists esteem the image of Hayagriva-Madhava as that of the Buddha himself in his Parinirvana state. It is interesting to note that from time immemorial several

Hindu temples of Assam have been regarded as Buddhist shrines by the Bhutanese who visit those places every year in groups during the winter. The Hayagriva-Madhava temple being the place where the Holy one was supposed to have discarded his mortal coils is revered by them as the greatest place of Buddhist pilgrimage.

The truncated hill-top where Hayagriva-Madhava temple stands contains another monument of the past known as the Fakuwa Dol, which was built by the Ahom king Pramatta Singha (A. D. 1744-1751). Though this temple is utilised only for a couple of days during the Deul Utsava (the festival of colour), its peculiar architectural form tends to show it as a class by itself, which appears to be an indigeneous innovation in contrast to the more common Indo-Aryan class. The temple consits of a receding series of steps, octagonal in circumference, on top of which stands an octagonal temple with a domical sikhara and houses a platform for installing the Radha-Krishna image at the time of the Deul-Utsava. This type of structure is seen in the precincts of several temples and Satras (Neovaisnavite monasteries) of the State.

II) GANESH DEVALAYA

This temple is situated to the south of the Hayagriva Madhava temple and just at the crossing of the P. W. D. Road linking Hajo Sualkuchi and the bifurcation to the Kedar temple. It is a late media eval brick-built temple built over the image of Ganesha hewn out on a huge natural rock, the later at the same time forming the back wall of the temple.

Ganeshapuja is the ouly annual Utsava celebrated here. On the days of other festive occasions also it is visited by people in crowds.

The temple and its compound are well-mantained. The architecture of the temple exhibits typical late mediaeval style of the state.

III) KAMESWAR DEVALAYA.

The Kameswar temple, a late mediaeval brick structure is situated on the top of a hill at the back of the Ganesha temple. It enshrines a Siva Linga.

The temple is located at an ideal place which can be seen from afar. It dominates a vast plain to its south and west. The temple. whose elvation is about twenty-five metres, can be approched by a pathway. It is not popularly visited except on special occasions.

IV) KEDAR TEMPLES.

The temples are situated on the top of a hill of the same name. The motorable road leading to it ends at the foot of the hill and one intending to go to the top has to do a little bit of footwork for about a quarter of an hour or so along a zigzag hilly path.

The site contains two temples. One of these is a Siva temple and the other is a Durga temple. The Siva temple is built in stone and is annexed with mandapas. It is a Rek-

ha-Deul of North Indian style but is simpler in comparison. The Durga temple is in a dilapidated condition. It is square in ground plan. The sikhara portion of the temple has already crumbled down. The well sculpted stone door-frame of the temple speaks of its earlier origin. There exists a water tank to the east of these temples a few steps below the ground level of the temles.

Inscriptional evidences show that the temples were reconstructed during the reign of King Rajeswar Singha (A. D. 1751-1768). But carved stones and building components show the area contained a beautiful temple of circa 10th-12th centuries A. D. Encircled by a hilly conclave, the site has a special appeal to the pilgrims.

11. SIDDHESWAR TEMPLE : SUALKUCHI

The Siddheswar Temple is situated at Sualkuchi, a small town famous for its handloom industries, about 24 kilometres west of Guwahati.

Located on a knoll just on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, the site consists of a brick built temple of the time of the Ahom king Siva Singha (A. D. 1714-1744). The site also exhibits evidences of an earlier stone temple of about 10th/11 th century most of the sculptures from which were utilised for decorating the outer walls of the brick temple .

The inside of the Vimana here enshrines a Siva Linga. The outer wall of the cella also contains a stone image of Visnu, apart from other images, erotic and non-erotic. Two large sculptures of Mahisasuramardini and Surya, both mutilated, are also to be seen.

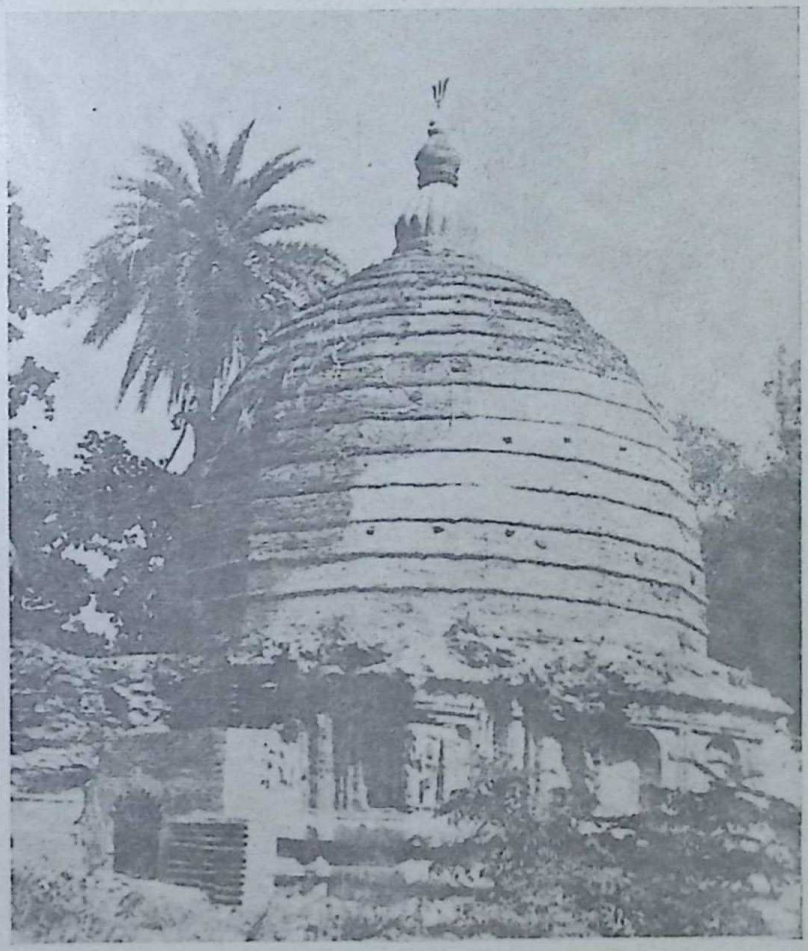
Siva is daily worshipped here. It is visited by the worshippers occasionally and also on festival days. Only vegetarian cooked food can be offered here.

12. MERGHAR TEMPLE : CHHAYGAON

Stone ruins of mediaeval and late-mediaeval temples are seen at a place popularly known as Chander Merghar near Chhaygaon, a roadside commercial centre on the south trunk road linking. Guwahati and Goalpara. It is 40 kilometres west of Guwahati and can be reached by bus, both Govt. and private.

The site contains two modern temples, facing each other, which are built on old foundations. One of the temples contains a Sivalinga in its perfectly round sunken sanctum made of well-chiselled stone masonry. The other temple with a raised sanctum enshrines a Devi image in stone of unknown identity. Both the temples are in daily worship. It attracts visitors only on the occasion of important religious festivals.

The area also contains an open-air Museum established by the State Department of Archaeology, Assam, which contains stone door-frames, sculptures and building components collected from the original ruins at the site. It needs mention in this connection that the ruins are popularly assigned to that of the Merghar (a building without a single



SIDDHESWAR TEMPLE, at Sualkuchi in Kamrup district. (P-8)

KAMAKHYA TEMPLE : GUWAHATI—Considered the most popular SAKTI PEETHA—reconstructed during later medieval period over pre-historic foundations. (P-11)

entrance) of the legendary merchant Chando of the Beula-Lakhindar episode.

13. CHANDIKA DEVALAYA.

The Chandika Devalaya is situated in the same locality as the Chandor Mergnar near Chhaygaon but across the trunk road. The presiding deity of the temple is the Devi.

The temple is made of bricks and was constructed on the ruins of an older temple. It is also connected with the Beula-Lakhindar episode. In addition to daily visitors, the temple attracts devotees in great numbers during the time of Durga Puja.

14. GOPESWAR DEVALAYA : BAIHATA.

Gopeswar is a wayside shrine on National Highway in between Guwahati and Baihata. It is only two kilometres south of Baihata-Chariali and thirty five kilometres north of Guwahati. Gopeswar is a natural cave temple dedicated to Lord Siva. To be precise, it stands in the mouth of a cave at the foot of a hill, although the deity is installed inside the cave. It is visited daily by worshippers. Sivaratri is observed here as its principal festival. Though all the existing structures here are modern,a copper-plate charter of king Siva Singha (A.D.1714-1744) mentioning donations of land to this temple exists, vindicating its existence even prior to the reign of this monarch.

15. PINGALESWAR DEVALAYA.

Pingaleswar is situated about 45 km north of Guwahati and except for its last five kilometres, which is gravelled, the distance is covered by the National Highway. It is roughly 10 km north-east of Baihata-Chariali.

Pingaleswar Temple enshrines a Sivalinga. Of late, a lofty masonry temple has been constructed here. It attracts daily visitors who offer grains, raw vegetables etc. as also fish, pigeons and other edible birds, as sacrifice, out of which the priests prepare boiled-rice and only one curry consistng of pulses, vegetables. pigeon-meat or fish etc. and offers to God.

That Pingaleswar contained an old stone temple can be known from its cellar which is made of block stones, as also from the sculptures and structural components which have been unearthed here. The State Department of Archaeology, Assam, has established here an open-air Museum where the sculptures and important carved stones are on display. The objects point to its antiquity, which may be assigned to 11th—12th century A.D. The sculptures and other carvings indicate that it was a well decorated temple. It is interesting to note that the sculptures found here contain several erotic pieces. A copper-plate charter, now with the temple committee, indicates that during late- mediaeval period it received liberal grants including paiks (serfs) from the royalty.

16. MADAN—KAMDEV DEVALAYA-

This Devalaya is roughly 40 kilometres north of Guwahati and five kilometres south-east from Baihata-Chariali on the National Highway. The last two or three kilometres of the road are motorable in fair weather only.

Madan Kamdev is a Siva temple. Established on the south-western tip of a small range of hills, its presiding deity is the life-size image of Uma-Maheswara in embrace. Though enshrined in an old

cella of stone masonry, the upper structure is a modern one built of C.I. sheet and timber. The site also contains a small temple also in C. I. sheet, which enshrines a Sivalinga. The temples are in daily worship and are often visited by devotees who offer here vegetarian cooked food, as oblations.

The range of the Madan-Kamdeva hill is flanked on its north and south by two lengthy ranges of hills seperated by paddy fields. A small river, now virtually dead, has formed a beautiful crescent along the southern side of the hill. The area has a rare natural beauty.

An exploration conducted by the State Archaeology Department, Assam, revealed that the area contained atleast twenty-four stone structures of 11th-12th century A.D. Clearance of jungle and exposition of ruins have already brought to light the old plinths of several structures and also a good number of sculptures and carvings. The State Department of Archaeology has taken up a scheme for converting this area into a spot of tourist attraction.

17. THE KAMAKHYA GROUP OF TEMPLES.

Kamakhya is a temple town atop a 180 metre high hill known as the Nilachala and is situated on the western part of greater Guwahati. It is connected with the foothills by three paths of yore from south, west and north respectively, the last one being partly contiguous to the river Brahmaputra. About twenty-five years back, a zigzag motorable road, about five kilometres long had been constructed to reach the top from the foothills. Both bus and taxi services are available from the foothill to the top where the principal temple complex is located.

An interesting legend has been woven around the establishment of the Kamakhya temple.

It is said that Naraka of Mithila captured this region from the Kiratas and took charge of the Kamakhya temple. The legend further has it that Naraka before long grew so bold as to ask for the hand of the Devi, to which the goddess consented on condition that he build a road from the foothills to the top in one night, together with a temple and a tank. Naraka did his best and almost succeeded when the goddess, apprehensive of his impending success, persuaded a cock to give his morning call, thereby indicating the break of dawn. The road or pathway on which this legend centres still exists and is locally known as "Kukura-Kata-Bat" (Kukura = cock. Kata = to cut, Bat = road or pathway). The Puranic records mention it as one of the fifty one pithas established over the discarded limbs of Sati, the spouse of Siva. It is considered the greatest centre of Sakti worship in North-eastern India. The Kamakhya temple and its neighbourhood record the earliest archaeological evidences of the State. The Umachala Rock Inscription on the eastern slope of the Nilachala hill dates back to the fifth century A. D. and is the earliest historical record discovered so far in the Brahmaputra valley. Certain decorative carvings found in the precincts of the Kamakhya temple go back to the time of the Imperial Guptas.

Kamakhya remained a potent site of architectural activity throughout the

historical period of the land. Starting with the establishment of the Kamakhya temple, it grew with time into a centre of constant building activity, creating in the process a series of temples, all belonging to the Tantrik, Sakta and the Saiva sects, and catering to their diverse sectarian rituals. At present, only nine complete old temples can be noticed, all of which have been reconstructed during the later mediaeval period over their older foundations. A few of these structures have been thoroughly restored during modern times.

The Kamakhya temple is the only complete example of the State now in existence, with a fully developed ground plan. It has all of the main chambers that a fully developed North Indian temple possesses, such as the Garbhagriha, Antarala and three Mandapas locally known as Chalanta, Pancharatna and Natamandir respectively. The Chalanta also possesses a Mukhamandapa, although in transverse position. The Vimana of the temple is a hybrid structure that has been brought about by the superimposition of a polygonal sikhara of the later mediaeval period over a typically North Indian cruciform structure of circa 11th-12th century A. D. This hybrid innovation of the mid-sixteenth century may be said to have revolutionised the temple architecture of Assam of the later period, as scores of temple of this type or of similar approach dotted the entire Brahmaputra Valley. The Chalanta and the Pancharatna possess Chala and Ratna types of roofing respectively, which grew so popular in Bengal in the later mediaeval period. The Natamandir is an apsidal structure which has been done in imitation of the impermanent Namghars (Vaisnavite prayer halls). Needless to mention, the Kamakhya temple proper (ie. the Vimana) was repaired or reconstructed many times during the past and the present shape continues to be more or less intact since the time of its last major renovation or reconstruction in A. D. 1562 by the Koch king Naranarayana (A. D. 1540-1584). The apsidal Natamandir was annexed to the original groundplan in A. D. 1759 by the Ahom king Svargadeva Rajeswar Singha (A. D. 1751-1768).

The sunken sanctum-sanctorum of the Kamakhya temple contains a natural rock-formation watered by an underground spring. symbolising the genital organ of Sati. This deity being unmovable, a metallic image of the Devi has been installed in the first Mandapa known as Chalanta. so that it could be taken out in procession on important festive occasions. The Pancharatna is also known as the Bhogamandapa and is used for performing different pujas intended to be offered by the performing different pujas intended to be offered by the pilgrims. The Natamandir is meant for the performance of ritualistic music, hymns, operas, devotional plays etc.

KAMAKHYA as described in the Kalika Purana :

Satyastu patitam tatra vishiirnam yonimandalam
silatvam agamad saile Kamakhya tatra samsthita. 62|76

—Truly has fallen there the shrivelled genital portion (of the sati's body) on the hill and turned into stone where Kamakhya is seated.

Tasyah silaya mahatmyam yatra kameswari sthita
adbhutam yasya gujyetu loham bhasma bhabedgatam. 62|78

—Mysterious is the glory of this stone, where Kameswari abides, for even iron turns into ashes if it comes to touch this secret.

Guhamanobhaba tatra manobhaba vinirmita
yonistasyam silayantu silarupa manohara
Vitastimatra vistirna ekavimsanguliyuta. 62|90

—There is the cavern of love built by the goddess of love where the yoni turned into stone exuding excellence and that stone-form is a 'vitasti' in length and twenty-one angulis in width. (vitasti-a measure of distance between the extended thumb and the little finger)

The daily ritual of the deity includes, interalia, sacrifice of a goat to be offered by the management of the temple. This apart, goats and pigions are often offered by pilgrims, which are either sacrificed or let loose in the compound according to the wish of the offerer.

The greatest annual festivals of the temple are the Ambubaci (in Asadha), Manasa puja (in Bhadra), Durga puja (Asvina) and Vasanti puja (Chaitra). During Ambubaci, a large number of visitors from North India, and particularly from West Bengal, visit the temple. Manasa puja (locally known as the Marai puja) is accompanied by the Deodhani (or Devadhvani) shamanistic performance where the Deodha or the dancer displays unusual physical feats and alleged parapsychic powers.

All the temples at Kamakhya centre on the Kamakhya temple, barring the Bhubaneswari temple which is situated on the highest peak of the Nilachala hill and is about half a kilometre east of the Kamakhya temple. The pitched motorable road to the Kamakhya township ends here. Its elevation is about 225 metres from the foothills. The site contains a brick-built temple of the late-mediaeval period and is one of the best spots of general attraction from where one can have a magnificent bird's-eye view of an

extensive area including that of the city of Guwahati and the mighty river Brahmaputra with its river-islands, sandbars and wavy coastlines. It is thus attractive not only as the greatest centre of Sakti worship in Northeastern India. but also as a spot of incredible scenic beauty. Added to these is the fact that it exists within Greater Guwahati and is easily accessible by a well-laid motorable road as well as other pathways.

18. NORTH GUWAHATI, IN AND AROUND.

Opposite to Guwahati and on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra is North Guwahati, a sort of a disjuncted extension of the city of Guwahati. It is linked with Guwahati across the river by two ferry services, One can go here from Guwahati by road also via the double decked road cum-railway Saraighat Bridge, which involves a journey of about twenty additional kilometres.

North Guwahati has deen tentatively identified as the Kamarupa Nagar of mediaeval Assam. During the late-mediaval period, it was a busy battle-ground between the local rulers and their enemies especially the nawabs of Bengal and the Mughals. coming from the west. During the historical period the area and its neighbourhood appears to have grown in importance and buildings in stone and bricks were raised in numbers covering a long period, traces of which can still be found in different places of the area. A few of the late-mediaeval Ahom kings are recorded to have encamped here covering long periods, during which they extended liberal patronage to the religious establishments including construction, improvement and reorganisation of temples.

I) DIRGHESWARI TEMPLE.

It is in the eastern exreme of North Guwahati and is situated in a secluded place on a hill known in old records as the Sita Parvat, overlooking the Brahmaputra river. It can be be approached by a gravel road. The name Dirgheswari has been derived from the long range of hills, of which only the eastern tip is occupied by the temple in question. Thus the Devi is the Goddess of a Dirgha (lengthy) range of hills. Almost the entire portion of the hill in and around the temple is rocky. The brickbuilt temple now in existence goes back to the time of the late-medieaval ruler Siva Singha (A. D. 1714-1744). But evidences show that it contained another temple of an earlier period, over which the present temple was built. The east and the southern slopes of the hill bear rock-cut sculptures and traces of temple foundations hewn out in rock, which go back to 10th-11th century A. D., if not earlier. The area of the temple being a projected portion of a lengthy range of hills into the Brahmaputra, it dominates a natural view which covers a vast area of the Brahmaputra, including the Umananda group of islands, Manikarneswara temple, Sukreswara-Janardan, Kamakhya atop the Nilachala etc.

The Dirgheswari is a Sakti Pitha and is supposed to have housed one of eight yoginis accompanying Kamakhya Devi. In addition to the symbol of Sati, the cella also contains a few rock-cut images. A perennial

hilly brook flows down by the side of its compound.

Except for a section of ardent followers from far and near who hold this temple in high esteem, the number of visitors to this temple is not as numerous as that of the other Sakti Pithas in and around Guwahati. Goats and pegions are offered as sacrifices.

II MANIKARNESWAR TEMPLE.

Manikarneswar constitutes the easternmost ward of the town of North Guwahati and consists of a small range of hills contiguous to the Brahmaputra in its south. It is very near to the Ferry service from Guwahati and is apporachable to its foothills by motor vehicle.

As a place of pilgrimage, Manikarneswar appears to be one of the most important centres since the mediaeval period . It contained a stone temple of the early period over which the present dilapidated brick temple was constructed during the late-mediaeval period. It happens to be the only twelve sided extant temple of the State. The sikhara of the temple is already lost and only the wall portion survives. It is a Siva temple with a sunken Garbhagriha.

The location of the temple on the highest spot of the range of hills has made the temple a rare spot of natural beauty from where a view of several temples in and around Guwahati, including the scenic beauty of the Brahmaputra and a view of the city of Guwahati, can be enjoyed. The temple has at present lost its past popularity. The Siva Ratri is the only great festival of the year here.

111) DOL GOVINDA.

It is situated at the heart of the town of North Guwahati and is only five minutes walk from the Ferry Ghat. It is by the side of the main road passing through the town.

Dol Govinda is a popular religious centre of modern times. It is a Visnu temple and a metallic image of the deity is installled in its sanctum.

IV) ASWAKLANTA.

Aswaklanta is a small hill perching on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. The shortest route to this place from Guwahati is by the Ferry service which plies very near to it.

Aswaklanta is associated with several legends, all of which point to the visit of Srikrishna to the site. Whether it is Rukma-Srikrishna, Naraka-Srikrishna or Abhimanyu-Arjuna episode, each one goes to prove Srikrishna taking rest here after the fatigue and exhaustion due to a tiresome journey, the visual evidence in support of which is to be found in an impression of the right foot of Lord Krishna on a rock at the foot of the hill, known as the Visnupada (where people perform the Sraddha ceremony of their dead relatives) and some alleged foot-print of horses on rocks, as shown by the Pujaris and Pandas of the temple, which in reality are

natural formations caused by water actions

The area contains two late-mediaeval brick-built temples, known as Kurma-Janardana and Anantasayi Visnu, both of which appear to have been built over the ruins of two earlier stone temples. Janmastami and Deul Utsava (Faguwa, the festival of colours) are the most important annual festivals of this place. On the occasion of the Asokastami, this place witnesses a big rush of visitors and devotees for taking holy bath in the Brahmaputra, as also for performing the annual Sraddha ceremony of their departed relations. On certain other occasions, such as Surya Grahana, Chandra Grahana etc., People assemble in crowds here for a holy dip (Snana)

Aswaklanta is famous for its rare natural beauty. The Aar Parvata (Screen Hill), a tiny hillock island a few metres off the bank, is a perennial abode of aquatic birds.

The view of the city of Guwahati and a few temples at certain hills, far and near, are also attractive.

ASVAKLANTA or Asvatirtha as the Yogini Tantra describes :

Brahma Visnu Rudronityam sannihitastrayah
asvatirthe maheshani nanyat punytamam bhumi. Uttar|3-53.

—Where Brahma, Visnu and Rudra are extant everyday, O' Maheshani, there is no such tirtha in the entire world as auspicious as the Asvatirtha.

Kasivasam yuganyatau dinaikam purushottame
tadeva kotigunitam Virajamukhadarshane
tatsadrisham gunam vindyad asvatirthe kshane kshane. -do-3-76.

—What can be gained by a stay in Kasi for eight yugas, a day at Purushattam, a crore-times thereof from a glimpse at the face of Viraja, can be achieved every moment at Asvatirtha.

19. TEMPLES IN GUWAHATI.

Guwahati is the biggest city of North East India. It is connected by railways, roads and air routes with the rest of India. Flight by a Boeing service from Calcutta takes only 45 minutes to Guwahati.

Known as Pragjyotishapura in the epic period, Guwahati appears to be the oldest

known city of this region. The earliest legends credit Naraka as the first ruler of the region, who is said to have migrated from Mithila in North India. All the early monarchs of Assam claim Naraka as their progenitor. Guwahati is supposed to be the capital of the Varmans (4th to 7th century A. D.) the earliest ruling family of Assam of the historical period. It remained either as a capital or headquarters throughout the historical period of the State of Assam.

Archaeologically, Guwahati and its neighbourhood exhibit evidences of the entire historical period of the State. Almost all the standing temples in and around the city are raised on the foundations of earlier structures, most of which will go back to a millenium or even earlier. Stone and terracotta pieces carved with exquisite designs and sculptures are often unearthed in differemt parts of the city during the course of excavation of foundation trenches for modern constructional projects. Almost all the standing temples in the city are the results of reconstruction by the late-mediaevl rulers of the land and all of them bear other evidences of earlier structures, either in the form of building components of as scattered seulptures and designs.

I) VASISTHASRAMA.

The site is located on a small hill known as Sandhyachala on the southern fringe of the city and is connected by city buses. It has a hilly surrounding with a rapid stream running across the area, on the eastern bank of which stands a brick temple. The site is famous for its natural beauty. Here it is supposed to have been located the Ashrama of the saint Vasistha of the puranic fame.

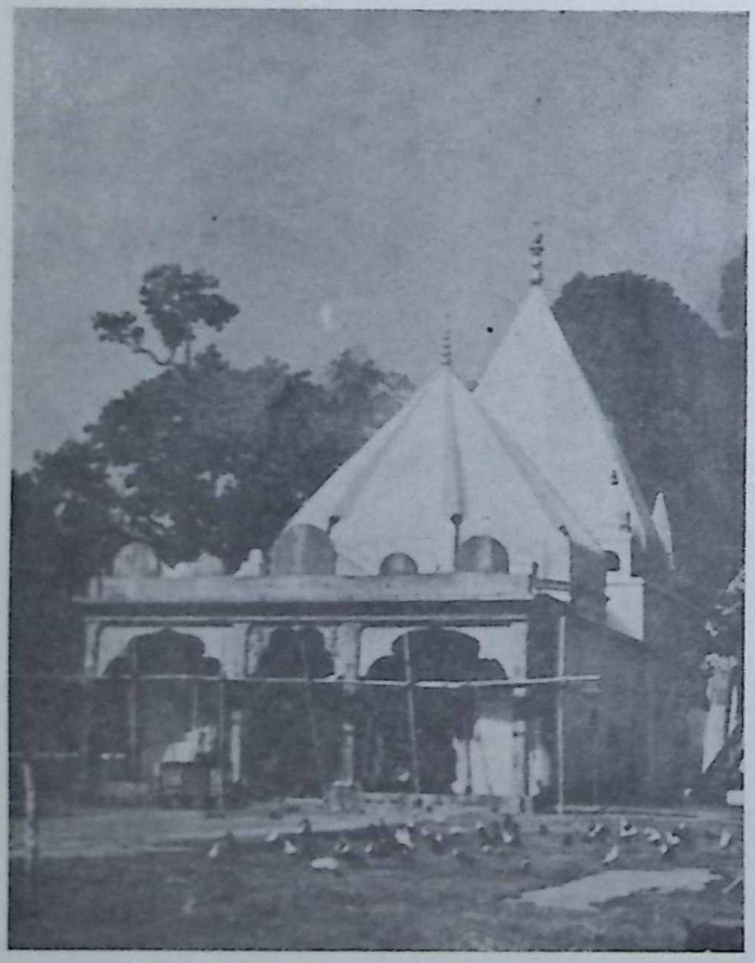
The standing temple at Vasisthasrama was built by Svargdeva Rajeswar Singha (A. D. 1751-1769), a king of the late-mediaeval Ahom dynasty of Assam in A. D. 1764. It is an octagonal temple with a polygonal sikhara over it. Existence of components of an older buildng at the site points to its earlier origin. The sunken garbhagriha or gahbar (Sanctumsanctorum) of the temple contains the alleged footprints of the sage Vasistha.

LALITA at VASISHTHA as described in the Kalika Purana :

Tasmad purvantu Lalita lalitakhy a saridvara
sagarad dakshinad purvam mahadevavatarita
vaisakha suklapakshasya trittiyayam narastu yah
kuryadvai lalitasnanam sa sambhusadanam brajet. 19/183

—To the east of that river is another auspicious river, known as Lalita, brought down by Mahadeva and flowing southward to the sea. One taking a bath in it on the third day of the moon in the month of vaisakha, goes to the abode of Sambhu.

VASISTHASHRAMA a modern structure on original site. (P-16)



MAHABHAIRAV TEMPLE at Tezpur in Sonitpur District, original establishment credited to Bana of the Mahabharata fame. (P-23)

A holy bath in the bubbling stream running behind the temple is supposed to be an act of singular sanctity. Visitors crowd the spot on the days of lunar and solar eclipses to enjoy a holy dip in the brook and wash away all past sins.

11) NAVAGRAHA DEVALAYA.

This temple of the nine planets stands on the Chitrachala hill on the north of the city. It is connected by a motorable hilly road and is only a ten minutes' ride by motor vehicle from the heart of the city.

It is believed that from time immemorial astronomy was practised is ancient Assam and Navagrha was its nerve-centre. The word Pragjyotisha-pura, the ancient name of the city of Guwahati, bears testimony to this, the word meaning either "City of Eastern Astronomy" or "City of Ancient Astronomy".

The temple-site has altogether three phases. The earliest phase belonged to the mediaeval period, its terminus ad quem being circa 12 th century A. D. Subsequently, a brick temple was built on the ancient site in A. D. 1752 during the reign of king Rajeswar Sinha (A. D. 1751-1769). which was badly damaged by the earthquake of A. D 1897. Recently, it has been rebuilt by the Navagraha Temple Committee, following the architectural pattern of its late-mediaeval prototype. The hill-top gives a magnificent view of the city of Guwahati.

The temple contains in its Garbhagriha, curiously, nine Siva lingas representing the nine planets of the Hindu myth. The well-planned arrangement of the lingas within the stone-pitched cella reminds one of its great antiquity. The temple is still held in high esteem by the Hindus who visit the temple all the year round to perform Graha Pujas. As can be surmised, the tradition of astrologieal studies in all its aspects is still a living one on its premises, the making of horoscopes being one of these. The daily worship of the temple is run heriditarily by a class of astrologer-Brahmins. A yajna is performed in the precinct of the temple each year covering several days when a big crowd assembles here to witness it.

III)—CHATRAKAR TEMPLES.

Chatrakar, a hillock, is situated in Ward I of the city, on which stand a complex of brick temples, and is easily approachable from a flight of steps starting halfway from the bottom of the path leading to the top of the hill. One does not have to exert much to reach the top, as the hillock is not very high.

The temples at Chatrakar are said to have been constructed in A. D. 1795 by king Kamaleswar Singha (A. D. 1795-1810), but archaeological evidences show that the site contained at least a stone temple of a much earlier period. It is said that originally the truncated top of the hillock was octagonal in plan, the edges of which were enclosed by an octagonal brick rampart from which the name Chatrakar (ie. umbrella-saped) has been derived.

The site contains two brick-built temples. Of these, the Mangala-Chandi Temple has been thoroughly restored a few decades back. It enshrines a metallic image of the Devi Mangala-Chandi. The temple also contain a beautiful image of Bangshi-Gopala of black basalt of the late-meliaeval vintage. The other temple happened to be, as evidences show, a dvikuta temple with two separate cellas built on a single ground plan. As usually happens in this region, time has taken its due toll on this temple, and of late it has been renovated. Incidentally, this happened to be the only dvikuta temple on record in the history of architecture in Assam. One part of the temple houses a Siva-linga, while the deity of the other part is missing.

Chatrakar is suppposed to be one of the important centres of Sakti worship in the city. Sacrificial offerings of goat, pegion, duck, gourd etc. are made here in conformity with Sakta practices. It is a popular temple of the city and is visited by pilgrims on all important festivals. The Vasanti puja is performed here annually with all pomp and ceremony. A school of Vedic study has also been started here very recently.

IV) UGRATRA TEMPLE.

This late-mediaeval temple is situated at the heart of the city. On its east are situated two old tanks from which the locality is known as Jor-pukhuri, the (Jor meaning a pair and Pukhuri, a tank).

It is an octagonal brick temple with a polygonal Sikhara over it and is believed to have been built by king Siva Singha (A. D. 1714-1744). It is a Sakti pitha where, it is believed, the navel of Sati, consort of Siva, fell when Visnu cut off her dead body with his Cakra into several pieces during Siva's aimless wandering with her corpse. Hence its sanctity. On the day of Navami of the Durga puja each year a huge crowd assembles on the premises of this temple to witness the buffalow sacrifice.

Being at the heart of the city which is one of the oldest localities of the city, the temple attracts daily visitors. Of late, the management of the temple has been reorganised and new schemes undertaken for the development of the temple-establishment.

V) THE SUKRESWAR GROUP OF TEMPLES.

The Sukreswar stands by one of the main thoroughfares of the city and is contiguous to the river Brahmaputra. It is not very far from the D. C's Court. The locality also contains the Northbrooke Gate,-a spot of historical importance and general attraction of the city.

The area contains altogether three historical temples. Two of them, ie. the Sukreswar and the Janardan temples, have been built by the Ahom king pramatta Singha (A. D. 1744-1751) in A. D. 1744 and the remaining one is the work of king Chandra Kanta Singha (A. D. 1811-1821) and was built in A. D. 1820. The Sukreswar and the Baneswar are both

Siva temples and contain Siva-Lingas, while the Janardan temple contains a stone image of Visnu. The Sukreswar and Janardan temples exist side by side on a hillock, the former at a slightly higher elevation. The Baneswar temple is situated on the other side of the road and is the smallest among the three.

Both the Sukreswar and Janardan temples are brick-built and are similar in architectural planning. Both of them possess a cruciform ground-plan, the profile of which has been continued in the vertical wall portion of the tumple. The Sikhara is polygonal, a common feature with most of the late mediaeval temples of Assam. Scattered remains of old building-components with sculptures at the site point to the existence of stone temples of circa 10th-11th century A. D. Behind the Janardan temple and just by the riverside exists a huge sitting image of four-armed Visnu, popularly known as Buddha-Janardana (in view of its sitting posture) flanked by an image of Su-ya and that of Ganesa, and a mutilated MahisaMardini, all belonging to 11th—12th century A. D.

The temples, because of their situation in a populous area of the city and partly because of recent restoration, have gained in popularity and attracct daily visitors in large numbers. The Janardan temple premises also house a Tol, ie, a traditional centre of Sanskrit learning.

20. UMANANDA AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD.

Situated in the midst of the Brahmaputra and just north of D. C.'s office are three hilly islets khown as Karmanasa, Urvasi and Umananda respectively. The only perennial communication to these islets is by boat.

All of the three islets bear archaeological evidences. A number of myths have been woven around them, thereby indicating their importance and antiquity. Howevr, of these three islets, only the Umananda is important as a centre of pilgrimage to the Hindus. The Urvasi islet, which contains bare traces of old temples and rock-cut images of the 10th/11-th century A. D., remains completely submerged in the turbulent Brahmaputra during monsoon. The hillock over which the temples of Umananda atand is mentioned in old recards as the Bhasmachala and the British called it the peacock Island. There are in all three temples on top of this hillock, of which two are situated within a massive boundary wall and the third one just outside the entrance to the enclosed area. The temples are respectively known as the Umananda, the Chandra Sekhara and the Haragauri, and all of them belong to the late-mediaeval period. The brick-built Umananda temple is the tallest, oldest and most attractive of the group. Built in A. D. 1694 during the reign of King Gadadhar Singha (A. D. 1681-1 96), the sunken cella of this Rekha Deul contains a Sivalinga. It also contained an inscribed image of Siva made of pure silver, weighing 1300 tolas, originally dedicated to this temple by king Siva Singha, the second successor of Gad-

adhar Singha, but was unfortunately stolen a few years back. The Chandra-Sekhara temple is said to have been built by king Chandra Kanta Singha in A. D. 1820. It is a square temple with an octagonal Sikhara over it and contains a Siva linga. The Haragauri temple is a small structure and enshrines a Sivalinga and was probably built during the first quarter of the nineteenth century A. D.

Khetri, the easternmost railway station of the Kamrup district on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. The temple contains the image of Kali. It is a very popular temple daily visited by people who offer goats and birds as sacrifice. The Kali puja is celebrated here annually as its principal festival.

The shrine has a long historical background and tradition, but the existing temple and its adjuncts are modern.

LOUHITYA as described in the Mahabharata.

Urvashim krittikyoge gatvacaiba amahitah
louhitye vidhivat snatva pundarika phalam labhet
ramahrada upasprisya bipasayam kritodakah
dwadasaham niraharah kalmashad vipramucyate.

—He who tekes a bath, in the manners laid and with devotion, in Louhitya or Urvasi, on the auspicious occurance of 'kittika', can achieve the gains of a pundarika yajna. One taking a dip in *bipasa* or *ramahrada* (parasuram kunda) after fasting for twelve days can get cleansed of all sins.

Umananda is one of the finest spots of natural beauty and is considered one of the five great panchatirthas around Guwahati. The Sivaratri, along with its fair, is the greatest festival of this place which attracts a huge crowd every year.

The islet bears definite signs of its great antiquity. Ruins from older stone temples can be seen scattered all over the place. A steep stairway, partly rock-cut, links the temples with the Ghat at the foothill.

21. KAMAKHYA TEMPLE : KHETRI

This Sakti temple is situated at

22. MURADEVAR MANDIR.

Muradevar is a village about 6 kilometres east of Kalaigaon in the Darrang district. Both private and Government Transports are available to Kalaigaon from Guwahati, which lies about 90 km north-east of Guwahati.

It is a Siva temple. The Koch king Naranarayana is credited to have established this temple in memory of the great priest Kendukalai, whom

the king appointed to perform daily rituals at the Kamakhya temple on the Nilachala hill. The story goes that one day Kendukalai was witnessing on the sly the Devi dancing naked. He was spotted by the Devi, whereupon she chopped off his head and threw it away which londed on this spot.

The old brick-built temple of Muradevar has partly submerged due to heavy subsidence. A new Mandapa and a Manikuta have been built in front of the original temple through public donations

23. RUDRESVAR DEVELAYA: MAHARIPARA.

Maharipara is a roadside village about 10km north of Sipajhar. The Rudresvar Devalaya lies a kilometre away from the P. W. D. road.

That the site of the temple contained an old temple can be seen from the remnants of old bricks lying there. The present temple consists of modern structures. Because of its existence from the time of the Ahom kings, which is corroborated by the existence of copper-plate charters, this temple as a centre of worship has great popularity. Daily Puja is offered here, accompanied by offering of cooked food. Both Siva ratri and Durga Puja are held here. The Deul-Puja is also observed here.

24. DEWALKHANDA DEVALAYA: MAZBAT.

Mazbat is a small township in the Darrang district and is about 140km north -east of Guwahati. Dewalkhanda is a secluded area, about three kilometres east of Mazbat.

Ruins of a stone temple existed in this place. Of late, a tall brick temple has been constructed here in which are enshrined a few carved stone pieces which are worshipped as Siva, Parvati and Lakshmi. The temple attracts visitors from the neighbouring tea gardens.

25. MADHAV GOSAIN MANDIR: ROWTA.

Rowta is on the National Highway on way to Tezpur from Guwahati. It is roughly 120 kilometre from Guwahati. Madhav Gosain Mandir is about 3 Kilometres south of Rowta and is reached by village read.

The site of the Madhav Gosain Mandir contained an old temple in bricks. Of late a new brick temple has been built over the old sanctum. It is a Siva temple, whose Garbhagriha has been completely engulfed by a banyan tree. The area around the temple is vacant and a rivulet runs close by it. The priests of this temple are non-Brahmins and belong to the Chutia community. During Sivaratri, a big fair is held here.

26. GUPTESWAR DEVELAYA: SINGRI.

Singri is a small range of hills, on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and is about 11 kilometres south of the commercial township of Dhekiajuli on the National Highway. The Gupteswar temple lies on the western end of the Singri hill. It is linked with Dhekiajuli by gravel road passing through a chain of tea-gardens.

The temple is located at an isolated place. The Brahmaputra, which was previously flowing continguous to this temple, now flows a kilometre south of it. The temple complex conists of an old temple of the

Rekha Deul type with a multichambered Mandapa, a spacious Namghar of the modern times and a few other Assam-type buildings for the use of temple-staff and visitors, all of these buildings along with the temple being enclosed by and old brick-built rampart. Nothing more is known about this temple except the fact that it is an old temple. On the basis of the structural details of the temple, it has been inferred that the existing structure belongs to about 12th century and received a face-lift during the late-medieval period. The precinct of the temple complex littered with stone pieces carved with images and designs, which perpetuate the memory of the antiquity of the temple.

The temple enshrines in its sunken Garbhagriha a Sivalinga, which remains submerged throughout the year in water, a fact from which the term Guptesvara has been derived. The temple enjoys wide popularity among the neighbouring people, its isolated position notwithstanding. The temple management committe has now initiated a scheme of performing marriages here according to Vedic rites against the payment of a nominal fee (it was Rs.100/-in 1980), with provisions of separate accommodation for the bride and the bridegroom parties for one night and also arrangement of priests and accessories for the rituals.

1) SURYANARAYANA MANDIR: GALCHEPA.

Galchepa is a sparsely populated area near Gahpur, annually visited by the flood waters of the Brahmaputra. It is roughly 7 kilometres south of the Nationol Highway and is connected by a gravel road.

With the discovery of a large stone image of Surya, a new temple has been established here. The stela of the image, which is 1.62 metres high, contains, in addition to the Surya image, all the other subordinate deities and consorts, which make it unique among the Surya images so far found in the Brahmaputra Valley. A big water-well of yore lined with bricks was also discovered here. The image is in daily worship and the people from the neighbourhood consisting mostly of Nepalees and garden labourers, visit this temple regularly.

27. TEMPLES AT TEZPUR.

Tezpur, the headquarters of the Sonitpur district, is reputed to be one of the earliest historical cities of the Brahmaputra valley. It is just on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and is about 180 kilometres east of Guwahati.

Tezpur is identified with Sonitpur of the Eqic fame. It is connected with the Naraka-Bana episode, which is indicative of struggle between the Saivas and the Saktas. Certain places in and around the town carry legends pertaining to the love-affair of Usha and Aniruddha (the nephew of Shrikrishna) which culminated in a battle between Bana, the Saivite king and Shrikrishna. resulting in the former's discomfiture and the union of the two lovers.

Heaps of ruins of great archaeological value can be found in and around Tezpur, the best among These are displayed in the Cole park in the heart of the town. Another site of general attraction is the Bamunipahar, a small hill on the eastern outskirt of the town overlooking the Brahmaputra, where ruins of a

huge temple-complex with seven independent structures can be traced. The ruin here consist of stone columns, architraves, pillar capitals, sculptures, carved stones and building blocks of varied shape and size.

But the gem among these is probably the Gupta temple door-frame standing alone on a brick-Plinth of circa 5th-6th century A.D. at a distance of five kilometres west of the town.

The undulated topography of Tezpur, criss-crossed with the dead courses of the turbulent Bharali, makes it one of the finest towns of the Brahmaputra Valley. Inter woven with legends and virtually littered all over with remains of structural ruins of a glorious past, it still continues to attract people Every temple or shrine in and around this ancient township, though is still thoroughly renovated and mutilated, has a link with the past history, however inflated and incredible it may appear, mixed as it is with myths and legend.

1) MAHABHAIRAV TEMPLE.

This temple is located within the town and occupies a hillock. It is linked by well-pitched municipal roads.

Legend assigns its establishment to the mighty king Bana of Epic fame. It enshrines a short Sivalinga, which appear to be old. The present temple however, is new and resembles a pyramid with an elongated apex. That the site contained an old structure can be ascertained from the existence of stone blocks and old bricks strewn all over the area.

Mahabhairav is the most popular temple of the town and is daily visited by a considerable number of people. The Sivaratri is the greatest festival of this temple which draws a huge crowd every year. A fair is also held on the premises of the temple on that day.

11) BHAIRAVI TEMPLE.

The Bhairavi temple is situated on the eastern outskirt of the town and is very near to the Bamunipahar ruins. It occupies a small hill lying at the confluence of the Brahmaputra and the old course of the Bharali. The site, because of its higher elevation, dominates a wide area around it and across the Brahmaputra.

The present Bhairavi temple is a modern structure, but that the site contained on old temple can be ascertained from the stone and brick ruins that lie scattered round the temple. A stone-pitched stairway links the temple with its foothill and a gravel road runs from here to the town.

The Bhairavi temple bears interesting legends. It is believed, that it enshrines the two feet of Sati of the puranic episode, — a story which gave birth to fifty-one pithas all over India. The temple has glorious association with Usha, the daughter of the legendary king Bana of Sonitapura, who is said to have invoked the blessings of the Devi in this temple,

The temple attracts a good number of daily visitors who hold it

in high esteem as a Sakti Pitha. During the days of the Durga Puja every year, it witnesses a rush of visitors. The head of the first goat sacrificed on this occasion is ceremoniously thrown into the Brahmaputra, the nearest course of which to the Bhairavi hills is considered as the river Bharali itself because of its close connection with the Bhairavi legend, though in fact the real tributary flows now into the Brahmaputra, few kilometres east of the site.

It is interesting to note that human sacrifice was once in vogue in this temple.

28. HALESWER DEVALAYA.

Haleswar is about 10 kilometre north of the town of Tezpur. It lies contiguous to the National Highway.

The Haleswar temple is a Saivite shrine. Its antiquity goes back to the time of king Rudra Singha (A.D. 1696-1714). The present masonry structure of the temple is a modern one which enshrines an old Sivalinga.

29. NANDIKESWAR DEVALAYA.

The Nandikeswar Devalaya lies about two kilometres north-west of Jamuguri. A fair-weather village road connects this temple with the National Highway.

As a centre of pilgrimage Haleswar attracts a good number of daily visitors. The Sivaratri is its main festival, when a large gatherng assembles here.

King Rudra Singha is credited to have built this temple. It is a small temple, surviving in a dilapidated condition, and is in daily worship. The deities here are worshipped as Nandikeswar and Nandini respectively.

The place witnesses a big crowd on the occassions of Sivaratri and Falgutsava. A big fair is also held here during the Bihu festival of the month of Vaisakha.

30. SAUBHAGYA-MADHAVA TEMPLE.

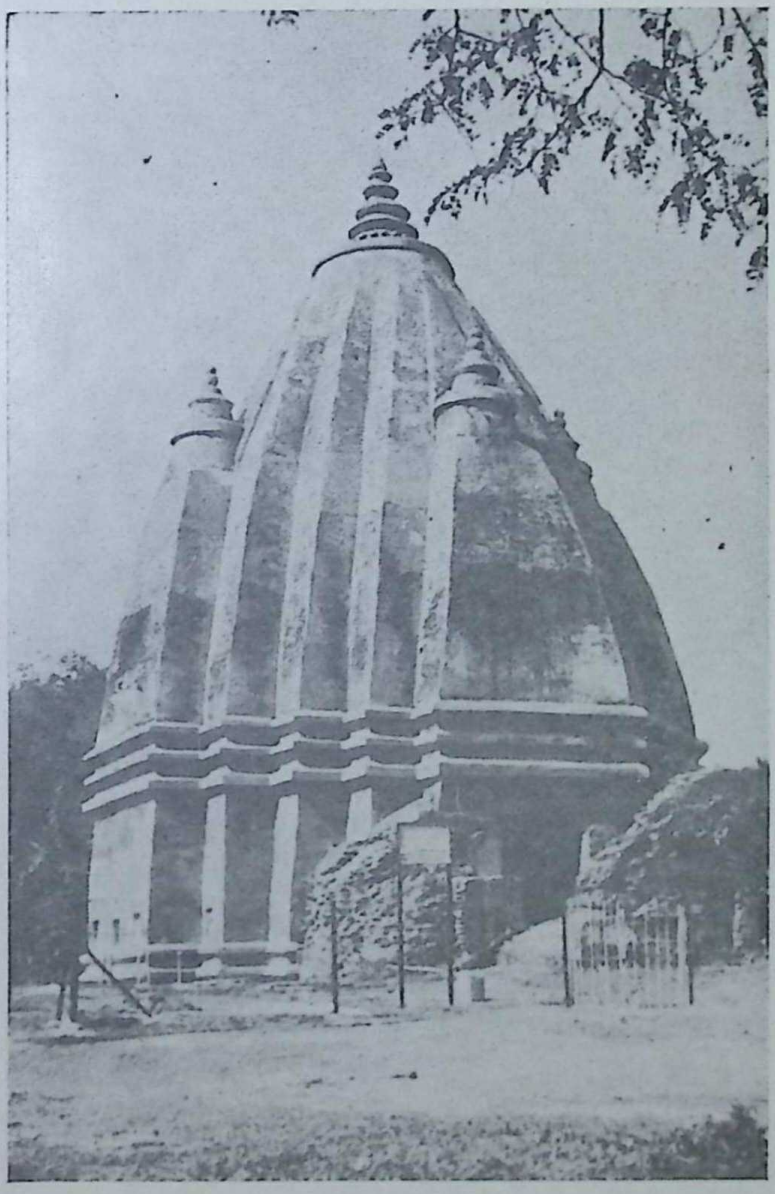
It is situated in the Madhav village near Jamuguri. Though assigned to the time of Rudra Singha (A. D. 1696-1714). the temple does not retain any structure of this period. The image of Madhava here is in daily worship. The Deul Utsava, the Ghunusa-Yatra and Janmastami are observed here annually. It is interesting to note that as per an old tradition the headman of the Daflas, a tribe from Arunachal, sends offerings to this temple annually.

31. NAGASANKAR DEVALAYA : JAMUGURI.

Nagasankar lies near Jamuguri. It is almost near the National Highway and is approachable by a well-maintained road.

According to late-mediaeval chronicles, Nagasankar was reconstructed by the Ahom king Susenpha in A. D. 1480 and it happened to be the earliest Hindu temple built by the Ahoms.

The site does not contain any-



BASUDEV DOL, Kalabari in Lakhimpur District. (P-27)

BAR DOL at Biswanath Chariali, Sonitpur District—rebuilt over old foundations by Ahom King Rajeswara Singha (1751-69). (P-26)

thing from old structures. In recent times the temple, along with its annexed Mandapas, have been newly constructed. It enshrines a Sivalinga which remainss submerged in the water of the sunken cella.

Because of its efficient maintenance and upkeep, this establishment attracts a large number of worshippers everyday. The Sivaratri is observed here as its principal festival.

32. BISWANATH KSHETRA

Strategically a very important place during the Ahom age, which served as a sort of contonment and controlled the river routes to upper Assam, Biswanath is in the Sonitpur district and just on the North bank of the river Brahmaputra. It is roughly eighty kilometres east of Tezpur, the district headquarters and about 250 kilometres away from Guwahati. The most convenient conveyance to approach this place from Guwahati is by State Transport.

Biswanath Kshetra comprises a wide area at the confluence of the river Burhigang with the Brahmaputra. The area also contains an island at the mouth of the Burhigang, known popularly as Umatumani (Uma's sand-bar). The entire khetra is believed to be one of the most sacred places of the Brahmaputra valley. The high banks as well as the rocky outcrops of the area tend to show that the region originally consisted of a number of hillocks of rare natural beauty which lost their original topography due to the actions of the two rivers through the centuries.

Biswanath bears a number of myths and legends, which make it almost equal in status to Kasi (Varanasi), what with the tradition of its possessing a crore of lingas minus one (Unakoti). The river Burhigang, which is the colloquial form of the Sanskrit word Briddha Ganga, is held in high esteem by the local people. As in the case of the temples in and around Tezpur, the legendary King Banasur is credited with the establishment of this second Kasi, too (also known as Gupta Kasi).

The scattered fragments of stone-buildings lying at Biswanath point to the existence here of old temples of the mediaeval period. The late-mediaeval Ahom chronicles credit several Svargadevas (kings) to have built temples here and issued land-grants for the maintenance of these temples. Although the area still contains a number of spots of religious importance, only two of the old masonry structures have somehow survived the ravages of time. Of these, one exists in its complete form, while the other is surviving somehow in a dilapidated condition and has been abandoned a long time ago as a living temple.

1) BISWANATH TEMPLE.

By Biswanath temple is meant at present a religious establishment consisting of a modern Manikuta (Cella) built of C. I. sheet roof and its spacious Namghar (prayer hall), also of C. I. sheet and timber. just behind this temple stands the

old brick-built structure, now abandoned, which perpetuates the memory of its antiquity. It is not exactly known who caused this late-mediaeval structure to be built, but its massive but simple construction and the less prominent recesses of the outer walls tend to show it to have been built before the starting of the vital phase of the building activity under the Ahoms. On the basis of the records of the Ahom chronicles, it may be assigned to the king Gadadhar Singha (A. D. 1680-1696) who is recorded to have built it in A. D. 1685.

The original spot where the deity of the Biswanath was first enshrined is traditionally believed to have been engulfed by the turbulent Burhigang, as a result of which it remains submerged in water throughout the year except during the winter season. In reality, this spot is a peculiar depression in the rocky bed of the river, which is cleared up of silt deposits during the dry season and daily worship conducted. This tradition probably shows the actual place where the mediaeval temple existed till it fell a victim to the encroachment of the river.

On the third day of the celebration of the Bahag Bihu, the Assamese festival, the metallic image of Bisvanath is taken out in the morning in procession to Bhur Gaon, a village five kilometres north of Biswanath, and brought back towards evening. Just at the gate of the temple, the congregation divides itself into two groups, one loyal to Visvanath and the other to the Devi inside the Garbhagriha. The supporters of the Devi resist reentry of the God on the plea that he is guilty of going out to participate in the Bihu performance, to the neglect of his consort. A sham quarrel ensues between the supporters of the god and those of the goddess the supporters of the god seeking entry on the plea that the god did not join any Bihu squad. This explanation is repeated seven times, followed by an equal numbers of circumambulation of the temple by the party. On being unheeded, the party forces its way into the sanctum. This festival is the greatest occasion celebrated in this temple. The festival is also accompanied by village fairs.

11) BAR DOL.

This Dol (temple) is the only complete structure of yore in the locality. It is a simple Rekha-Deul of north Indian style with a Do-Chala (gable-roofed) Mandapa in its front. It is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India.

The temple houses a Bana Linga, said to have been established by the legendary king Bana of Sonitapura. The present brick-built temple is the work of the Ahom king Rajeswar Singha (A. D. 1751-1769).

III) CHANDI MANDIR.

Located in a conspicuous place just on the bank of the Brahmaputra, this temple is said to have been built by the Ahom king Gadadhar Singha (A. D. 1680-1696). The temple

houses two natural depressions in the subterranean rock, but the original masonry structure does not exist at present.

The temple is revered as one of the principal Sakti Pithas of the State by the local people and is supposed to have been sanctified by the presence of the right shoulder and right breast of Sati of the Puranic fame.

IV) UMAVANA OR UMATUMANI.

The island of umatumani contains, according to local tradition, the left shoulder and the left breast of Sati. The island contains a number of sacred places dedicated to such deities as Harihara, Kardameswara, Mahabhairava, Somanatha, Vrisaddhvaja. Kasinatha Gaurivallabha, Madhava, Visnu, Vasudeva, etc, none of which. however, contains any old masonry temple at present. Evidences, however, are there that at least a few of the places contained brick temples which have tumbled down in the past. The island also contains a stone inscription and some other evidences of archaeological interest.

Biswanath contains a number of other temples also, none of which contains any structure of architectural importance. A few natural rocks in and around Biswanath, such as, Barala Sil (i e. Bachelor rock), Kalabhairava etc., carry interesting stories; but these donot bear any historical significance.

33. VASUDEV DOL : DOLOGURI.

Dologuri is a popular area about 5 kilometres away from Kalabari on the National Highway. It is linked by a gravel road,

Dologuri contians a 20 metre high temple of the Ahom period. Because of its dilapidated condition, the image inside the temple was removed and enshrined in a temporary shed in front of the temple. The State Department of Archaeology is conducting its repairs at present. The Visnu image (metallic) here is worshipped daily. Apart from the annual festivals of the neo-Vaisnavites, meetings and musical programmes are also arranged here during the time of Bihu. Formerly this area was famous for Mukali Bihu (Bihu dances performed in open fields by young boys and girls in separate groups), which is rare at present.

34. MAGHNOWA DOL : DHALPUR.

Maghnowa lies about six kilometres north of Dhalpur in the Lakhimpur district, and five kilometres away from the National Highway. linked by a well-maintained gravel road.

On the western end of Maghnowa and near the bank of the Pichala river, an old temple enclosed by an old brick rampart can be seen. This temple is identified as the Phulbari Devalaya of the past, which became famous as a centre of Sakti worship. It is also believed that a number of Ainams (hymns sung at the time of occurence of pox) were composed here. The temple does not house any deity at present. A Manikuta (sanctum-sanctorum) of modern times, erected in front of the temple, enshrines the Bhagavata scripture which is daily worshipped by a priest. Occasionally, villagers assemble there and perform

Namaprasanga (devotional chorus). The Ahom community from the nearby villages perform their rites before a terracotta image fixed on the gatehouse at the entrance to this temple by sacrificing hen, pigeon, duck etc.

35. GHAGUWA DOL: GHILAMORA.

Ghilamora is roughly 50 kilometres away from North Lakhimpur the district headquarters of Lakhimpur, and linked by a pitched road. The Ghaguwa Dol is roughly two kilometres away from Ghaguwa.

The Ghaguwa temple is situated beside the Ghilamora-Dhemaji road. It is an old brick temple, the history of which is not clear. It is in daily worship.

36. HARHI DEVALAYA : DHAKUWAKHANA.

Harhi Devalaya is located near Dhakuwakhana, a mofussil town away from Ghilamara. Though the Devalaya is very old, the Manikuta along with its Namghar are quite modern. It is a Devi temple and is in daily worship. It contains several icons, such as Durga, Siva, Manasa etc. The Durga puja is celebrated here annually.

37. VASUDEV THAN : NAROWA.

This place is about 16 kilometres away from Ghilamora. The establishment of this Than has a long history. Its old temple has already been dismantled and reconstructed in the form of a slim and tall spired chapel. It houses a standing image of Vasudeva of about 16 th century, made of black stone. It is in daily worship and attracts daily visitors which consist of Nepalis and different tribes from the neighbourhood.

38 MALINI THAN : LEKABALI.

Malini Than is eight kilometres away from Lekabali in the Dhemaji district. It is just on the border of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

Siva and Devi images are worshipped in Malini Than. The Archaeology Department of the Arunachal pradesh excavated the ruins and discovered old temple plinths and numerous sculptures of about 12 th century A. D., which are preserved at the site.

Apart from visitors from different parts of the state, the daily visitors now consist of the persons from the Border Security Forces encamping nearby.

39. RAIDONGIA DOL : BARBARUAH.

Raidongia is about 30 kilometres away from Dibrugarh and roughly 10 kilometres away from Barbaruah on the National highway.

The Raidongia is the only temple of the Dibrugarh district which has survived intact from the Ahom period. It is a Siva temple, though the stone images on the body of the temple point to its Vaisnava origin. It is a living temple and is in daily worship.

40. SIBSAGAR GROUP OF TEMPLES.

Sandwiched between the two old Ahom capitals of Gargaon and Rangpur, respectively 15 km and 5 km away, the modern town of Sibsagar and its peripheri contain the most important groups of temples built by the Ahom royal

DEVI DOL at Sibsagar, built around 1734. (P-29)

SIVA DOL, at Sibsagar—a rare architectural specimen in the entire country—built around 1734. (P-29)

dynasty, as well, as secular buildings. During the British rule, the township constituted the administrative headquarters of the Sibsagar district, which it still is. It is about 350 kilometres east of Guwahati and is linked by State Transport and Private Bus services with their day and night services.

Of the two erstwhile capitals of the Ahom period, the fortified capital-city of Gargaon contains a fourstoreyed Ahom palace, a spacious gable-roofed magazine -house and evidences of some other buildings. Rangpur on the other hand contains a large brick-built four-storeyed palace (known, locally as Talatal-Ghar) with a small domical temple a top, a big gable-roofed magazine house and a few temples around. About a kilometre south of the Talatal-Ghar is a very big tank, Jaisagar by name, on the north and west bank of which stand three major brick-built temples, the most famous of which is the Jai Dol or Shri Kesavarai Dol, which will be described later.

The town of Sibsagar has grown up with a very large 18th century tank as its nucleus, also known as Sibsagar. On the south bank of this tank stands a temple complex consisting of three structures (Sivadol, Visnudol and Devidol), brick ramparts with archways (now destroyed) and a long flight of steps. All of these architectural works, including the tank, were done around A.D. 1734 under the patronage of king Siva Singha (A.D. 1714-1744).

I) SIVA DOL.

This is the tallest old structure in Assam now in existence. It is about 40 metres in height and consists of four axial chambers, such as, the Garbhagriha, the Antarala and two Mandapas, the last one being reconstructed in modern times. The Vimana of the temple is a Rekha-Deul of the Indo-Aryan style, but simple in outer decorations. Its peculiar multitiered finial, vaguely reminiscent of that of the chhatravalis of Buddhist stupas, is an attractive feature not to be seen elsewhere in India. The Antarala (vestibule) is a Do-Chala (gable-roofed) structure resembling an Assamese thatched house, while the first Mandapa is a Chou-Cahla structure with four roof-slabs on four sides converging into a finial, and with curvilinear cornices, similar to those found in late-mediaeval Bengal.

The Siva- Ratri is the biggest festival celebrated with fanfare in this temple when a huge crowd assembles and a big fair is held. The deity inside is a Svayambhu Siva Linga shaped out of a natural rock.

II) DEVI DOL.

The temple stands a few cubits west of the Siva Dol. Architecturally, its lower portion resembles a Rekha Deul while the dome is round in cross-section encrusted with vertical salients. The Mandapa of the temple is a typically Assam-type Do-chala structure.

The Durga puja is the greatest festival observed here. The temple does not contain any original deity. During the period of the Durga

puja, clay pratima is installed here.

III) VISNU DOL.

The Visnu Dol is situated a few cubits form the Siva Dol to the east and is almost similar in plan as well as size to the Devi temple. In elevation also its lower portion is similar to the Devi Dol. But its round dome is criss-crossed with ridge lines forming a number of squares all over the surface, each square containing a flat full-blown lotus.

The Ratha-Yatra is the greatest festival of this temple. The deity is taken out in a well-decorated chariot during this occaion, followed by a procession of devotees going round the town.

41. JAISAGAR TEMPLES.

Jaisagar is five kilometres south of Sibsagar by the National Highway No. 37. The place has derived its name from the large tank, Jaisagar, named after Jaimati, who sacrificed her life for the sake of her husband Gadapani (after ward Gadadhar Singha), an aspirant to the throne, who was hounded from place to place by the ruling king, Sulikpha. Failing to catch Gadapani, king Sulikpha had Jaimati tortured to compel her to reveal the hideout of Gadapani. Rather than betray her husband, Jaimati preferred death, and after fourteen days of inhuman torture, she died. This is the largest tank excavated by any Ahom king. Except for its north and part of the west bank, the other spacious banks of the tank have been occupied by a numher of Government establishments, including the Sibsagar College. The banks also contain a well-pitched motorable road along the four sides of the tank. The tank including the historical monuments on its banks were built by the Ahom king Rudra Singha (1696-1714), Jaimati's son.

1) JAI DOL COMPLEX

The Jai Dol and its annexe occupy the east end of the north bank of Jaisagar. The compound contains four independent structures, the tallest and the finest among them being the Jai Dol. Known also as the Keshavarai temple, this Visnu temple was constructed in memory of Jaimati, the mother of the builder-king.

The Jai Dol has a fully developed plan, consisting of a Garbhagriha, an Antarala and two Mandapas. Architecturally, the elevatory features of the Vimana are typically similar to the late mediaeval temples of Assam and consists of Ratha projections on its lower half, superimposed by a domical Sikhara of circular cross-section. The outer walls of the temple are decorated with designs and sculptures, while the Sikhara is decorated with squares formed of intersecting vertical and horizontal lines inset with full-blown lotuses. The Mandapa and the Antarala are Do-chala structures of the Assamese type. Only the plinth of the front Mandapa exists. It was a spacious Mandapa with an apsidal front. The temple can be said to be one of the finest pieces of architecture done under the Ahoms patronage.

The compound also contains three other structures, known as Surya Mandir, Ganesh Mandir and a Bhog-

ghar (Bhogamandapa or the kitchen-house), none of which are architecturally important.

The temples of the Jaisagar complex are not living shrines. They are protected by the Archaeological Survey of India.

II) VAIDYANATH SIVA DOL.

Further to the west of Jai Dol and on the same bank exists a small Siva temple, known as the Vaidyanath Siva Dol. Built under the patronage of the same king, this temple is a squat affair. smaller in size and simple in construction in comparison to the Jai Dol. In Plan it is square, with a comparatively smaller dome but bigger **Angasikharas** (decorative mini-sikharas). The walls are decorated with a single register of monotonous naked Siva images. It is also provided with a Mukhamandapa of local **Do-chala** type. It is also a dead temple and is preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India.

III) DEVI DOL.

This temple exists on the west bank of Jaisagar. Also known as the Devi-Ghar,it is a big **Do-chala** building and is one of the best examples of the Assamese chala type of masonry buildings done by the Ahoms. It is also provided with a Do chala Mukhamandapa. It has long ceased to be a living shrine. It is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India.

IV) GHANASHYAMAR DOL.

Further south of the Devi Dol and on the same bank stands this temple. It consists of three buildings,ie.. a Gate-house on the north, the temple at the centre and an out-house on the south. all of them being done in bricks. The outer walls of this rectanguhar temple is ornamental with terracotta sculptures depicting Dasavataras, Mahisamardini and other images plus, Krishna playing on flute, monkeys, griffons floral pat erns and other designs of rare beauty. From the architectural point of view, the building complex exhibits Islamic influence. It is not known what type of Puja was prformed here. It is a dead temple at present and is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India.

V) RANGANATH DOL.

About half a kilometre north of the Jai Dol and on way to the Palace Complex (ie. the Talatal Ghar) exists the Ranganath temple. It is an octagonal temple with a round stunted Sikhara. A peculiar feature of this temple is that it is provided with a series of battlements at the sprining line of the dome. Built in bricks, the temple also contains a Mandapa. It is a living Siva temple and is under the protection of the State Archaeology Department. The Siva Ratri is observed here every year.

VI) HARA-GAURI TEMPLE,

This temple also exists in the vicinity of Ranganath Dol. It is a small Do-chala structure and is under the protection of the State Department of Archaeology. It is a dead temple.

VII) GAURI—VALLABHA TEMPLE,

Said to have been built during the reign of king Lakshmi

Singha (A. D. 1769-1780), it is a domical brick structure of medium size, and is a living temple. It is under the protection of the Department of Archaeology, Assam.

42. TEMPLES AT GAURISAGAR.

Gaurisagar is a roadside village on the National Highway No. 37 and is about 12 kilometres west of the Sibsagar town.

Gaurisagar is a big tank from which the locality has derived its name. On its north bank stands three old temples, all built during the reign of king Siva Singha (A. D. 1714-1744). An orthodox Sakta, whose times were mostly spent in observing religious rituals and who was under the complete influence of his religious precep tors, so much so that when the Brahmin, priests and astrologer predicted the imminent end of his rule, he abdicated and set up his chief queen, Phuleswari,on the throne who became "Bar Raja" or chief king, the king consecarted the tank to Gauri or Durga, the consort of Siva. The three temples are dedicated to Durga, Siva and Visnu respectively. All the three temples are typically akin to the three temples of Sibsagar, but smaller in size.

They are protected by the Archaeological Survey of India.

43. TEMPLES AT NAMTI.

Namti is situated about twelve kilometres south of Jaisagar. It is linked by a gravel road. Namti contains two small temples from the time of the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha (A. D. 1780-1796).

The bigger are among these is a Siva temple, while the smaller one is a Visnu Dol. They are under the protection of the State Department of Archaeology, Assam, and are living temples.

44. GARAKHIYA DOL : BALIGAON

This temple exists about 5 kilometres north of Jorhat, the headquarters of the district of the same name. The temple does not seem to have any historical background, although local tradition has it that it was established by the cowherds of the area, following a miraculus incident leading to the death of a cowherd on the spot. Be that as it may, the temple is held in high esteem as a Siva shrine by the people. The main shrine here is an ant-hill, roughly 4 metres high, over which stands a modern temple built of C. I. sheet roof. A pair of cobras has taken shelter in the ant-hill, since when it is not known, which is equally revered by the devotees. Every day with the beating of the ketlle-drum at noon, the cowherds from the nearby fields assemble in the temple and get their traditional quota of Prasada consisting of soaked gram and green-pulse and also fruits. The Sivaratri is the greatest festival of this temple.

45. PASUPATI DEVALAYA.

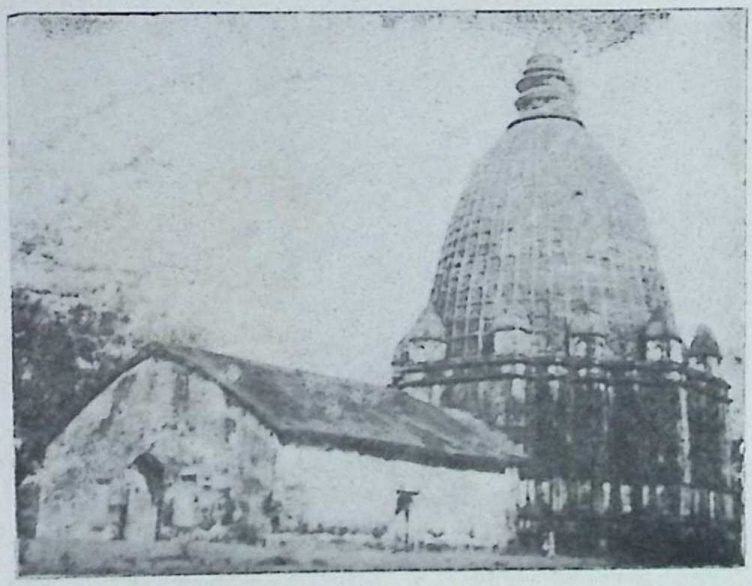
Situated at the village Hajari, about five kilometres away fron Jorhat, this Devalaya contains images both of Siva (Batuka Bhairava) and Devi (Kameswari).

The images are housed in a modern building. The deities are believed to be alive. Worship is done daily and Durga and kali Pujas are performed annually.

46. BURHI-GOSHANI DEVALAYA : JORHAT

This Devalaya is situated near Gar-Ali in the heart of the Jorhat town. The establishment consists of modern buildings but the ten-armed octo-alloy Mahisasuramardini image that it houses has great historical back ground. Known as the image-

Vishnu Dol at Sibsagar, built around 1734. (P-30)



JAI DOL at Jaisagar, 5 km from Sibsagar-built between 1696 & 1714. (P-30)

VAIDYANATH SIVA DOL, Jaisagar, 5 km from Sibsagar.
(P-31)

DEVI GHAR at Jaisagar 5 kms from Sibsagar. (P-31)

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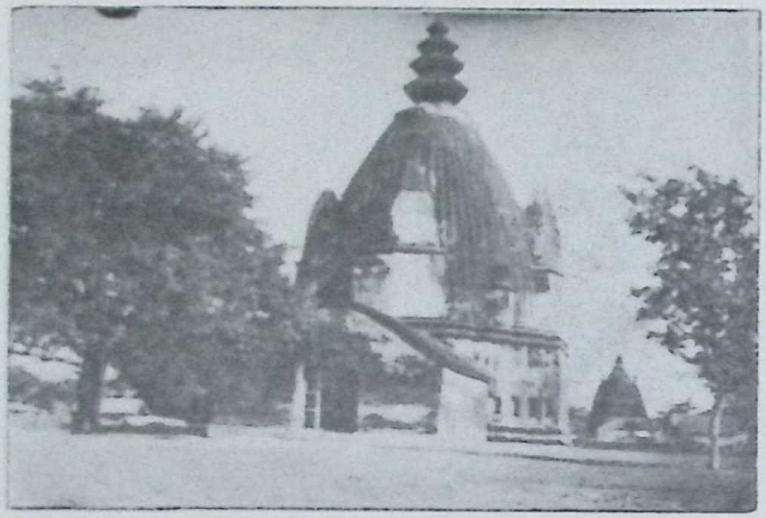

GAURISAGAR TEMPLE about 12 kms west of Sibsagar. (P-32)

SIVA DOL at Negheriting about 20 kms west of Jorhat. (P-33)

of the Burhi-Goshani, this Devi was brought during the reign of the Ahom king Rudreswar Singha (A. D. 1696-1714) by the vitcorious Ahom army from the bank of the river Burhi in the country of the Jayantiyas, —one of three major tribes of the State of Meghalaya of modern times. Towards the end of the Ahom rule, when the capital was shifted to Jorhat, this image was also transferred there, but no masonry temple under the royal patronage could be erected due to the Burmese invasions. The temple is visited by local people on festive occasinos. It is a Sakti Devalaya.

47. HATIGARH DEVALAYA : JORHAT.

This Devalaya is about 8 km away from the headquarters town of Jorhat. It is a Siva temple and houses a Sivalinga. Its plinth is old but the superstructure is modern It is in daily worship and is visited by devotees from the neighbourhood.

48. NEGHERITING TEMPLE.

The Negheriting is a hillock about two kilometres north of Dergaon,— a mofussil town about 30 kilometres west of Jorhat. It is only a kilometre off the National Highway No. 37 and the path is motorable.

The temple at Negheriting was started under the reign of the Ahom king Pramatta Singha (A. D. 1744-1751) and completed by his successor Rajeswar Singha (A. D. 1751-1769). It is a Panchayatana Siva temple enshrining Visnu, Durga, Surya, Ganesh and Siva. The temple consists of a central Rekha Deul with four smaller structures added to it. on its four corners, the overall view of the entire complex being a graceful architecture of singular shape not to be found anywhere in the state. Though with individual Sikhara for each of the deities, the plan of the temple is a single one, with provision of separate Mukhamandapas for each of the Garbhagrihas.

Both Sivaratri and Durga Puja are celebrated here with pomp and eclat. The temple also attracts daily visitors.

Secluded and with a natural backdrop, the Negheriting temple is a spot of general attraction. The temple is approached through a long stairway, built on the ruins of a Pre-Ahom temple. It is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India.

49. DURGA TEMPLE : DEOPANI.

Deopani is situated about forty five kilometres away from Golaghat and is on the way to Dimapur.

The Durga temple at Deopani is a modern temple built over the ruins of an archaeolgical site of great importance. The temple enshrines a number of stone images, big and small, the largest among them being that of Durga. It is about 1.80 metre in height and is assigned to the 8th-9th century A. D. The temple also contains images of Visnu, Ganesh and a number of unidentified images of about 8 th century vintage.

The Durga puja is the greatest religious festival of the temple.

50. BABASTHAN OF NUMALIGARH.

It is situated about two kilometres south of Numaligarh, a road-side bus station about fifty kilometres west of

Jorhat. It is roughly thirty five kilometres south of the Sub-divisional town of Golaghat and exists beside the blacktopped Numaligarh-Dimapur road.

It is a modern temple and enshrines an old Siva Linga. Though Siva is its presiding deity and Sivaratri is celebrated here, the Puja gets precedence over Saiva festivals Durga here, because the devotees mainly consist of tea garden labourers from the tea-estates located in the neighbour hood. On the Deopa rvat nearby exists extensive temple ruins belonging to 10th-11th century A. D., from which some of the ruins were in all probability carried over to the nearby Baba-Than down below.

51.HATIMURA DOL : JAKHALABANDHA

Jakhalabandha is a moffusil town situated on the National Highway 37 and is about forty five kilometres east of Nowgong the headquarters of the Nowgong district. About two kilometres north of Jakhalabandha is Hatimura, a small hill just on the south bank of the Brahmaputra The hill can be approached by a road-cum-bund. On the top of this hill is situated the Hatimura Dol, a late-mediaeval temple.

It is a Saptaratha brick temple of the Rekha type. A peculiar feature of this structure is that its Ratha salients are unusually acute which is not seen in any late-mediaeval temple of the state. The temple is in a dilapidated condition and has now been taken over by the State Archaeology Department for preservation.

The temple enshrines the image of a ten-armed Mahisasuramardini of about 18th century A. D. engraved on a stela containing five scallops on top. The building of the temple is credited to the Ahom king Pramatta Singha (A. D. 1744-1751).

Being away from normal transport facilities, the temple does not attract sizable daily visitors. However, on festive occasions, it is visited by a fairly large number of devotees,. The last portion of its approach has, since some years, been eroded by the Brahmaputra which, if not checked, may completely erode it within a year or two.

52. KAMAKHYA TEMPLE : SILGHAT.

Silghat is a major Ferry Ghat on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra. It is eight kilometres north of Jakhalabandha, and is linked by a black-topped road.

Bordering on the bank of Brahmaputra and in-between Silghat and Hatimura Parvat (mentioned above), about three kilometres further east, exists a range of hills, the two ends of which contain two temple establishments, namely the Durga (ie. Hatimura) and the Kamakhya temples.

The Kamakhya temple of Silghat is in its entirety a late-mediaeval establishment. The portion of the hill over which it stands was previously known as the Samantagiri (Elephent hill). The brick temple with its Mandapas was built during the reign of king Pramatta Singha (A. D. 1744-1751) upon the ruins of a mediaeval stone temple. The Vimana is a Pancharatha structure medium size and the Mandapas are built in the Do-chala style. In addition to the daily visitors, the temple attracts devotees during major religious festivals. Durng the time of Asokastami the place witnesses a fair and

a huge crowd assembles there for a holy dip in the Brahmaputra. Silghat, because of its location beside the Brahmaputra, has attractive landscapes. The Ferry service from this place links both Tezpur and Panpur on the north bank. It is also linked by the State Transport service and the Railways.

The extensive area south of Silghat is known as Kaliabar. This entire area contains a number of temples built with or without royal patronage. Among them only the Nrisingha Devalaya contains an old chala-type tsructure.

53. AKASHIGANGA TEMPLE RUINS.

Akashiganga is situated about ten kilometres away from Dabaka on the Dabaka-Diphu road. It is roughly sixty kilometres south-east of Nowgong, the district headquarters.

Akashiganga is a famous spot for picnickers, a lofty waterfall exists there in a natural setting, the foot of which is littered with stone ruins belonging to the 10th-11th century.

Of late, new temples have been erected in this site. Both Visnu and Siva temples exist here. Secluded and away from main communications of the district, the spot attracts occasional visitors only.

54. DEVASTHAN TEMPLES.

Devasthan can be approchedfrom Nilbagan, a small road side commercial center about fifty five kilometres away from Nowgong-Lanka road. It is roughly forteen kilometres from Nilbagan along the Nilbagan Howraghat gravel road.

Devasthan contains a group of mounds within a well-demarcated area, each of which contains a stone temple, now all in ruins. Two of these temples have already been cleared and modern structures erected on them. Only the cella of the remaining have been cleared and used for worship. The ruins range from circa 8th to 12th century A. D. The site, because of its seclusion, does not attract many visitors.

55. MIKIRATI TEMPLE.

The temple exists within two kilometres from the township of Dabaka. It is approachable by a fair weather road.

The area contains several mounds containing both stone and brick ruins. Only a portion of it has been developed into a place of regular worship. The new temple does not attract much visitors, located as it is in a secluded corner with bad communication facilities. The ruins, however, range back from 5th-6th century A.D.to the 12th century A.D. (A torso in stone colleeted a few years back has been tentatively assigned to the 7th century A. D.)

56. GACHTAL TEMPLE,

Gachtal also lies in the vicinity of Dabaka and contains ruins of stone temples. A stone-inscription belonging to the 13 th century A. D. was recovered a few years back from the site.

The site contains a Siva temple of modern times. It is a popular place of worship among the local people.

57. RAJBARI TEMPLE : JOGIJAN.

Jogijan is a railway station of the Guwahati-Lumding railroute. One can go by road also from Hojai by a gravel road. Rajbari lies a kilometre south of Jogijan. As there is no motorable level-crossing at Jogijan, the only means to visit Rajbari

from Jogijan is on foot.

Rajbari contains altogether nine temples, all in ruins. Three of these temples are brick-built and are already badly ravaged. The remaining six temples are of stone and exist within one compound enclosd by a massive brick wall, now in ruins. Out of the six temples, two have already been constructed anew wherein the images of Uma-Maheswara are enshrined, and the remaining four have been taken up by the State Department of Archeology for preservation. The entire compound of the complex is littered with numerous stone pieces, many of them richly carved. The temples can stylistically be assigned to the 10th 12th century A. D.

A fair is held here every year on the occasion of Sivaratri. Daily worship is also in vogue.

Rajbari and its neighbourhood have the scope of being developed into a spot of tourist attraction.

58. NA-NATH DEVALAYA.

Na-Nath is only a kilometre west of Rajbari. The area contains altogether eight mounds containing brick ruins.

The mounds exit in two parallel rows, each containing a temple in ruins, and the door of the structures face one another in pairs. The temples contain a Siva-Linga each A peculiar feature with them is that, while the Yonipithas of one row are round, the shape of those of the other row are square.

Sivaratri is the greatest festival of the Devalaya. Because of bad communication its importance as a religious centre is confined only to the neighbouring villagers.

59. BISHNUPUR THAN : KAWAIMARI.

Kawaimari is a small village about eight kilometres up stream along the river Kapili from Kampur, a mofussil town of the district of Nowgong. It is connected by a gravel road. The Bishnupur Than is situated in the heart of the village.

The temple, a modern one, enshrines two stone images of Visnu, one large and the other smaller, assignable to 11th-12th century A.D.

The Rasa festival is celebrated here with due pomp and fanfare every autumn when a fair is also held.

The site also contains ruins of more than one stone temples. The areas in and around Kawaimari have a number of spots containing old ruins and a few tanks. Most of those spots have already been disfigured and pilfered. A stone image of Visnu, similar in style and size to that of the Visnupur Than, has been salvaged a few years back from the bed of an old tank and enshrined in an impermanent shed on the bank of the said tank.

60. BOGAJURI THAN.

Bogajuri is in the Kathiatoli area on the Nowgong- Lanka road. It is just in the foot hills of the Dabaka range.

The area contains a number of modern temples. Some of the temples contain images of yore, discovered in the locality during land-filling for agricultural purposes. the important ones being a stone Trivikrama image of Visnu (size 79 cm X 43 cm) and two metallic images, one of a Devi (size 6 cm X 5 cm) and a six handed male image (Vasudeva) of 11 cm X 8 cm size respectively. The spot also contains temples of Rama, Hanumana

etc, A natural spring has enhanced the attraction of the spot.

61. MAHAMAYA THAN.

Mahamaya is a small range of hill on the Dabaka-Diphu road and is within one kilometre from Dokmoka, a newly developed urban establishment just on the border of the districts of Nowgong and Karbi Anglong. The Mahamaya Than with an elevation of 250 metres is situated on the top of the hill. A fair-weather bridle path connects this Than with the foot-hill.

The spot contains the remains of a small brick temple, the upper portion of which has already fallen down. The area also contains stone fragments from an old stone temple and also a small pond. A few broken pieces, presumably fragments from stone sculptures, along with the mutilated stone image of a Devi are enshrined in the Cella of the old temple. Daily worship is conducted here. Worshippers converge here on festive occasions by scalling on foot the serpentine hilly path ; and during the time of the Durga Pnja the spot wears a gala look.

The Mahamaya Than is believed to be one of the few places of the State where human sacrifice was performed during the historical period. The greater area around the Than (a sanctuary) contains a few spots attributed to certain historical events. A birds-eye view of the plains from atop the hill is most fascinating.

62. MADHAV GOSAIN THAN.

This Than is situated about thirteen kilometres away from Kampur and is approachable by a gravel road.

The Madhav Pahar is a range of isolated hill beyond which the hilly terrain of the district of Karbi Anglong begins. The river Barapani has flowed in between the Madhav Pahar and Karbi Anglong. The sanctuary stands just at the foot of the hill and is contiguous to the river. The temple establishment consists of a natural cave as its cella, in front of which are erected the Namghar (Prayer hall) and a few other structures. The deities consist of a few gragments from stone images. Visnu is worshipped here as its principal deity.

Previously, the temple attracted a large number of devotees, which has decreased in recent times due to the exodus of the thinly populated local people under increased influx of immigrants to its neighbourhood. The hill contains several natural caves, some of which were used previously by mendicants. A few of the caves were so spacious that people from the neighbouring villages organised Naama Prasanga (devotional musical recitals accompanied by kettle-drum and cymbals) annually in them, which of late has been discontinued.

63. MAHADEOSAL.

Mahadeosal is a roadside village about ninety kilometres east of Guwahati and is located on the National Highway No. 37. It is only a kilometre east of the Thekerabari railway station on the Guwahati-Tinsukia railway link.

Originally an open-air sanctuary patronised by the tribals, a new temple has recently been constructed here. It is a Siva temple and the Sivaratri is observed here annually.

The site contains remains of a stone temple of circa 11th-12th century A.D.

64. GANESH THAN : MAYONG.

Mayong lies about 30 Kilometres north of Jagiroad in the Nowgong district and is linked by private bus service. Near it and just on the roadside is seen a huge image of Ganesha, roughly 3 metres high. Though the site is not associated with any history or historical edifices, the image is held in high esteem by the neighbouring villages. The Ganesh Puja is performed here annually.

65. KALI MANDIR : KHASPUR.

Khaspur is roughly 20 kilometres from Silchar in south Assam. Khaspur was the last capital of the Kachari kings. The area contains several buildings constructed by the Kacharis, such as a gate house, temples and a secular structure known locally as the Baroduwar. Only one out of the above temples is now in worship. Known as the Kali (also Chandi) temple, this brick temple is a Bengal Chala-type structure with a humped ridge and curvilinear ends. It is held in high esteem by the local Hindus.

The ruins consist of a few huge door lintels carved with images and floral designs, pillar capitals, structural components etc. The site is under the protection of the State Department of Archaeology.

66. SIVA MANDIR : SIV TILLA

The small township of Sonai lies about 16 kilometres away from Silchar and is linked with Silchar by private transport. Siv tilla lies about a kilometre away from Sonai.

The Siva tilla is a small hillock in the midst of a paddy field. It is roughly 40 metres from its surroundings. On its top can be seen two temple structures, known as the Siva Mandir and Nandi Mandapa respectively. Built over a moderately high and spacious plinth, the Siva temple is a square structure with a pyramidal roof on it. It enshrines a Sivalinga and is under daily worship. The outer walls of this temple contains two inscriptians inscribed in old Assamese on stone slabs. The Nandi Mandapa is a small structure which housed the image of Nandi, the vehicle of Siva, which is now missing. A committee looks after the management of this religious establishment which has erected a few other structures near the temple. Sivaratri is held here annually, when people from neighbouring villages assemble here.

67. BHUBAN:PAHAR TIRTHA.

Bauban Pahar is a tall range of hills about 65 kilometres north-east of Silchar. One can travel by private transport to its foot-hills, but there is no permanent approach to the top of the hill. During the time of festivals, the devotees clear a passage through the hilly terrain, by which one must walk more than two hours to reach the site. The site contains the images of Bhubaneswar-Siva and Bhubaneswari Devi. The Sivaratri, Deulyatra, varuni festival etc. are its annual festivals, when the site witnesses a big fair.

THE SATRA INSTITUTION OF ASSAM

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THE SATRA INSTITUTION of Assam is a product of the Vaisnavite movement initiated by Sankardev towards the closing decade of the fifteenth century of the Christian era. The institution since its inception has been serving as the radiating force of all religious activities of the vaisnavite communities. During the first two hundred years of its existence it played a dynamic role in spreading and stabilising the vaisnava faith and movement in Assam. But since the British occupation of Assam and the impact of western education and ideas on the people, it has gradually ceased to serve as a dynamic institution and consequently its influence and hold on the people started decreasing fast.

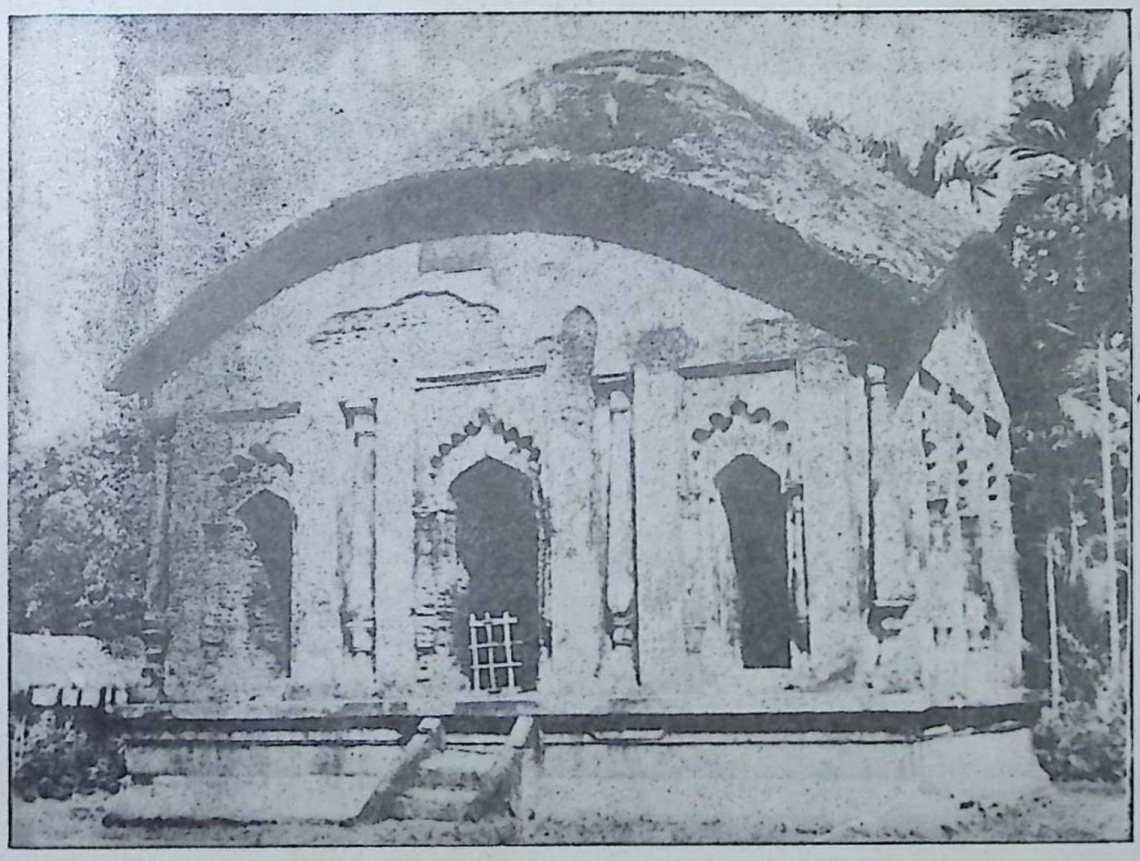
Satras of Assam resemble, to a certain extent, the vaisnavite mathas and akharas of other parts of India. Each satra consists of three principal parties or categories of other persons intimately connected with the welfare and mangement of the satra. These are i) the **Satradhikar, 2) Bhakats** and **3) Sisyas.** The first two categories generally reside within the four walls of the satra campus, while the third ones live in scattered villages leading an ordinary life of a house-holder. The head of a satra is popularly known as **Adhikar.** His position is similar to that of a Mohunt of the matha institution or the Abbot of the Christian monasteries. He is the religious head and spiritual guide of the flock under his care. He initiates disciples and conducts all important religious functions. The second party, i.e. the Bhakats consist of those devotees who either hold ecclesiastical office under the satra or lead an intensive devotional life within the campus of the satra, observing celebacy through their lives. In purely monastic satras where celibacy is strictly observed, the number of such Bhakats, or celibates are more numerous than those of the semi-monastic or non-

monastic satras. Such celibate devotees are popularly called **kevalia-bhakats**. The word kevalia is derived from the Sanskrit kevala i.e, lone or unattached. These celibates are recruited in their teens by elderly celibates and under the guidance of the latter, they remain as apprentices for a few years to learn the manners and customs as well as the religious secrets of the cult. The lay devotees or disciples of a satra are called **sisyas**. Every Assamese Vaisnava family is invariably affiliated to one or the other of the five hundred and odd satras of Assam.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES: The structural pattern of a satra is marked by the existence of a **namghar** a manikut, a karapat and two or four rows of hatis. The centre of all religious activities of a satra is the **namghar** It is a long open hall with gabled roof and apsidal facade. It serves as a prayer hall as well as the seat of all meetings and discussions. The actual shrine where the image of the deity and the sacred scriptures are kept is called **manikut**. It is comparatively a smaller structure adjoined to the eastern or the southern end of the prayer hall (**namghar**). Thus the Prayer hall and the shrine are modelled on the structural pattern of a Hindu temple which consists of **garbhagriha** containing the image and a mandapa hall. The **namghar** with its apsidal facade and the **manikut** attached to it exactly resemble the main temple of Kamakhya with a similar apsidal mandapa hall adjoined to the main shrine. On the four sides of the satra campus stand four rows of huts known as **hati** where the **bhakats** of various categories reside. In satras of the monastic type where only celibates are allowed to reside the **hatis** are entirely inhabited by the celibate devotees. but where celibacy is not strictly enforced, one or more sides of the campus are reserved for married devotees. In most of the existing satras, however, the system of constructing **hatis** is not strictly followed. The entrance leading to the interior of a satra is usually marked by a small open house known as **karapat (sk. kapata)**. Distinguished guests are first received at the **karapat** and then escorted to the interior.

The following description of the Garamur satra as given in the District Gazeteer of Sibsagar, 1905, may be cited as a representative description of a monastic satra of Assam.

"The buildings of the satra are approached by a good road which is constrcueted at some expense. The namghar is a huge structure, the roof of which is supported on huge wooden pillars and the great floor-space is entirely bare save for one or two lecturns on which the sacred writings are reposing. The actual shrine is a separate building closely adjoining the eastern end of the **namghar**. The shrine is very different from the penetralia of the Sakta temple. There is no trace of blood or grease; there is nothing disgusting or grotesque and the whole place is dominated by the note of decency and propriety which is so marked a characteristics of vaisnavism of Majuli. In a square round the gardens stand the lines of huts in which the resident monks live. They consist of well-knit rows of rooms which are much more spacious than those ordinarily occupied by village folk and are kept scrupulously clean. There is singularly gracious and pleasing in the whole atmosphere. Everything is fresh, neat and well-to-do. The well groomed smiling monks



KALI MANDIR at Khaspur, Cachar District. (P-38)

SIVA TEMPLE Cachar District. (P-38)

are evidently at peace with themselves and with the world at large and the children are recruited from villages and trained to be dvotees, but if at any time they find the restraint of celibacy irksome they are at liberty to return to the outer world."

USE OF THE WORD SATRA: The term satra is a Sanskrit word where it is used in two senses; firstly in the sense of an alms-house or charitable institution and secondly in the sense of a sacrificial session lasting for several days or more. The latter sense is responsible in leniding the nomenclature to the Vaisnavite institution of Assam. It has been stated in the opening chapter of the Bhagavata-purana that during the course of a sacrificial session at the forest of Nimisa, Suta Ugrasrava expounded the above Purana to the assembly of sages. The fact that a sacrifice called satra (sattra) proceeded concurrently with the act of expounding Bhagavata easily led people to think that a satra and an assembly of devotees listening to the exposition of the Bhagavata are identical. Sankardeva probably initiated the Vaisnava movement by reciting and expounding the stories of the Bhagavata-purana to a band of followers who clustered around him to listen to his religious discourses. The part played by Sankardeva probably reminded the listeners of the part played by Suta-Ugrasrava in the assembly of holy sages. Under the above erroneous impression devotees began to term an assembly of devotees where the Bhagavata used to be read and discussed as a satra, even though the word actually meant a form of sacrifice. The etymological meaning of the sattra is a sitting or a session (sad-to sit, tra) or an instrument which liberates the noble (sat-good, trai - to liberate), must have supplied additional reason for forming the above notion. The Sanskrit word sattra very naturally bec me satra in Assamese.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: The first stage of the growth of the satra institution began with Sankardeva. But during his life-time the religious association organised by him did not take a shape of a regular institution of permanent nature. Sankardeva no doubt laid the foundation of the institution, but the super-structure was raised during the succeeding generations. Madhabdeva, who succeeded Sankardeva as the head of the vaisnavite sect did not preside over any satra left by Sankardeva. It was at the time of Madhabdeva and Damodardeva that the satra institution approached the second phase of its development. There are definite references in medieval biographies of saints to the part played by Madhabdeva and Damodardeva in giving shape to the structural as well as the organisational side of the satra institution. Madhabdeva, besides reconstructing the Barpeta satra on a permanent basis, systematically divided the prayer services into fourteen units and made necessary arrangements for the smooth running of the satra. Simultaneously Damodardeva also systematised the management of his satra by alloting definite functions to different individuals and arranged to fix a definite procedure of religious service to be conducted daily in his satra. The satra institution took a purely monastic turn in the hands of Vamsi-Gopaldeva who introduced some changes in his Kalabari satra in eastern Assam towards the last three decades of the seventeenth century. His satra at Kuruwabahi, established later on provided rooms for five hundred celibate

devotees. The final phase of the growth of the satra institution reached with the extension of royal patronage to all important satras. The successive Ahom kings placed at the disposal of different satras certain number of persons to act as paiks (persons engaged to render definite services) and granted lands free of any charge. This act of royal patronage placed many satras on a sound economic footing. But, to look into the affairs of satras and to keep the court well informed of situations at different satras, an officer known as Satriya Barua was appointed. Thus some sort of contact developed between the royal court and the satras.

FUNCTIONS OF SATRAS: Functions of the satra institution may be classified into two categories, viz. primary and secondary. Its primary functions are to propagate vaisnavism based on monotheistic principles, to initiate disciples, to provide ethico—devotional codes and conducts for the neophytes and to hold religious festivals on different occasions. Satras have been acting more or less as the guardians of religion and morality by keeping a close vigilance over their disciples. By maintaining regular agents at different localities and by personal visits, the heads of the satras have been trying to elevate the spiritual and moral standard of the villagers. The secondary functions of the satras are to see that good social relation is maintained amongst the villagers, to develop the spirit of co-operation, to provide adequate facilities for the dissemination of ancient learning and to dispense justice on all social and religious controversies. Before the introduction of the British system of administering justice, satras used to do the same in many cases relating to social matters.

MANAGEMENT AND INCOME: The present income of satras is mainly derived from two sources. These are (1) income from lands originally granted by the kings of the pre-British days and sub-sequently confirmed and recognised by the British government, (2) income from the religious tithes contributed by disciples. Besides the above two sources occasional donations and subscriptions from disciples and devotees constitute a minor source of income. All important satras posses, in varying degrees, land-grants ranging from a few acres to several thousand acres some of which are completely free from revenue charges. The second source yields income according to the number of disciples and followers. Every disciple is expected to make a small contribution annually in cash or kind to the satra. The demand is small enough and does not generally exceed a rupee in cash or a few seers of rice or some wearing apparel. Formerly the payment of **gurukar** (tithe) was considered as indispensable as the payment of Government revenue, though there was no legal obligation to pay that sum. In recent years, however, the income from the second source has considerably gone down as people are no longer conscious of any religious obligations to their satras.

For the efficient management of the satra and for conducting religious services regularly the head of a satra, in consultation with the senior devotees, appoints from among his disciples functionaries to manage different departments of the satra. There are several gradations of such functionaries, who according to status and rank, exercise control over their respective departments. Contacts between disciples of far-flung villages and the satra are main-

tained through a set of functionaries selected from the villagers themselves. All the functionaries are usually nominated by the head, but in some satras they are selected on the basis of elections.

OWNERSHIP AND PROPERTY : There are three types of ownership: 1) ownership vested on the chief idol of the deity of the satra, (2) ownership vested on the community of devotees and (3) family ownership. In the first case, the satra theoritically belongs to the idol of the deity, to whom the entire property of the satra is dedicated. The ownership of a satra is in some cases collectively vested on the community of devotees with the **satriya** or the **adhikar** as the nominal head. The third type of ownership is prevalant in most of the satras where the head-ship devolves on hereditary principles and the satra is managed by a particular family. The head in the first type of ownership is a trustee of the satra property in the name image of the deity. The powers exercised by the head of such a satra is mostly determined by long **standing** customs and practices. In the second type of ownership, the power of the head is very much limited.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF SATRAS : The part played by the satra institution in other spheres, besides the religious, deserves notice. During the last few hundred years of its existence, it has enriched Assamese life socially and educationally and has contributed a great deal to the realm of literature and art. One of the most notable social contributions of the satra institution is the upliftment of the backward classes. So called untouchables and backward classes were freely taken into the fold of vaisnavism. Though inter-dining and inter-marriage between different castes were not prescribed, yet the spiritual bond and feeling fostered by the Satras reduced to a considerable extent the rigor of caste distinction. Another notable social contribution of the institution is its services amongst some of the tribes of Assam. Non-aryan tribes like **Koch Moran, Chutiya, Ahom** and **Kachari,** were brought to the fold of Vaisnavism and Vaisnavite missionary activities were also conducted amongst tribes like **Miri, Naga** and **Aitonia.** In Sankerdeva's translation of the Book II of the **Bhagavat Purana,** we find a significant stanza wherein the tribes of Assam have been mentioned as attaining liberation under the influence of Vaisnavism. Aniruddha Bhuyan, the founder of the Mayamara sub-sect confined his proselytising activities to the north eastern region of Assam, mostly occupied by the **Chutiyas,** the **Morans** and other indigineous non-Aryan tribes. The satras affiliated to the Kala-samhati branch of Assamese vaisnavism, notably **Dihing, Sessa, Budbari, Bareghar,** and **Katanipar** deserve special mention for their missionary activities amongst the backward and tribal people.

The satra institution contributed to the spread of learning and education in medieval Assam. All principal satras used to maintain Sanskrit tols and services of reputed scholars were requisitioned to run those **tols.** A satra was a religious centre, a school and a library also. Not only existing books were preserved with care, but books were also imported from other places of India. The books were not left to lie fallow. They were industriously

and assiduously copied and worn out ones were replaced by new copies. In the field of literature, the contribution of satras is no less considerable. Devotional lyrics, dramas and religious kavyas were composed and dramatic performances were regularly held to the delight of the masses. It became a customary practice with every **satradhikar** to perform a play composed by himself to mark his accesion to the religious head-ship of the satra. Biographies of saints **(carit-puthis)** and satra chronicles **(satra-vamsawali)** are also important contributions of the satras. The art of music and dance also received considerable impetus from satras. Satras developed a school of classical dance and music in Assam. It is entirely religious in outlook and motive. The art of wood and ivory carving was practised in some satras. Figures of deities and hideous masks were carved out of wood and little doll-like figures of gods and goddesses were beautifully carved out of ivory by artisans of some satras. The art of book illustration by means of miniatures was scrupulously cultivated by unknown painters living within the religious atomosphers of certain satras. The epics and puranas were generally illustrated and pictures are available in all combination of colours. The artists were more concerned with their narratives than with the exhibition of their accomplishent. Mere technical skill is held in reserve in subordination to the narrative flow of pictures. In short, the cultural history of Assam in respect ot fine arts and crafts, of education and learning since the beginning of the sixteenth century till the advent of the British, largely developed centering round the Vaisnava movement which in turn found expression through the satra institution.

The rapid expansion and increase in numher of the institution during the latter half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries cannot he accepted as an unmixed blessing for Assam. The mushroom growth and increase in number diverted a large number of able bodied persons from agriculture and compulsory rendering of the State services to the satra precincts where they were absolved from the duties of a **paik.** By the end of the seventeenth century the number of satras increased to more than five hundred. Lured by power and pelf, descendants of every notable proselytiser started establishing new satras and this process went unhindered till the reign of Godadhar Simha (1681-1694) who, in his wisdom, decided to put a stop to this process. To quote Edward Gait, "The neo-Vaisnavite sects, founded on the teachings of Sankar Dev had now attained remarkable dimensions. The country was full of religious preceptors and their followers who claimed exemption from the universal liability to fight and to assist in the construction of roads, tanks and other public works. This caused serious inconvenience, which the Sakta Brahmins, who had the king's ear, lost no opportunity of exaggerating. .....He therefore resolved to break their power for good and all.....Nor did the **bhakats** or disciples fared much better. Many of them were deported to out-of-the-way places and made to work as coolies on the roads, others were mutilated and they were put to death." **(A History of Assam,** pp 168-69)

Gadadhar's son Rudra Simha, however, revised the policy of persecution.

Having made a survey of the then existing satras he gave recognition to many of them and helped in their resettlement. Patronage extended by the kings paved the way for the rat race among the satras to gain royal favour in the shape of revenue-free **dharmottara** land and servitors. Landed and other properties granted to satras varied from satra. to satra Seats in the royal court were also reserved giving precedence to the four principal satras of eastern Assam.

As the result of the closer contact with royal court, austerity ans simplicity which marked the satras earlier were replaced by formality, pomp and grandeur in most of the richer satras. The heads of such satras became not only objects of reverence, but also came to be looked upon with a sense of awe and fear. Almost all the satras, specially of central and eastern Assam became victims of gradual alienation from the masses and began to be marked by growing spirit of conservatism and orthodoxy in place on catholicity which characterised the early history of the institution. Women and so— called backward people were debarred from entering prayer halls of the satras.

Intolerance towards the beliefs of other sects, undue importance paid to tradition and formality, ignorance of learning and rampant superstition, love of luxury and ease, lack of missionary zeal on the part of the satradhikars and their associates and similar decadent trends have made the institution a static one. Because of this gradual loss of the dynamic quality the satra no longer enjoys the same enviable status which it used to do formerly. Unless it adapts itself to the changing circumstances and regains its dynamic quality, its future cannot be assured. ●

The Namghara Or The Prayer-Hall Of Assam

(Construction, Spiritualism and Decoration associated with it)

Dr. Naren Kalita.

THE COMMUNITY PRAYER-HALLS called Namghars in Assam can be broadly divided into two categories from the architectural and traditional modes of their construction : (i) the three-roofed halls with apsidal front and (ii) the three roofed halls presenting a special style of construction in their 'Bhanj-ghar'. The prayer-halls of the first category are found of have been flourishing in upper Assam from Nagaon upwards and the second is a speciality in Kamrup. Some of the prayer-halls of the first category include a separate building called Manikuta and some are without it. However the Manikuta serves the same purpose as does the 'Bhanj-ghar, of the second category. In both cases the building, being the place of worship of idols, might have a later date for getting its admission into the architectural complex of the Namghar. There are also a few paired Namghars in some places, but they do not have any speciality in construction.

The prayer halls display a sense of extreme simplicity as does the cult of Bhakti itself present. There are several discriptive hymns signifying the close association of spiritualism and symbolic meanings with the mode of construction of prayer-halls particulary the three-roofed ones with apsidal front. It is not clearly known as to how old or authentic are these hymns. The biographical works on the lives of the Vaisnava saints of medieval Assam do not refer to such descriptive hymns, though several ones have records of the construction of places of worship. The 'Katha Guru Carita' among all other biographies has even recorded a supernatural episode of a pair of sandals getting longer at the touch of the Guru. The biography also narrates the background of the compositon of 'lata-Kata ghosa' (the lore of designing creepers) by Madhavadeva after looking at similar designs on the door and mentions the actual position of Joya and Bijoya on the gate way to the place of worship. As such non-reference of discources on spiritualism associated with the construction of prayer-halls in the biogra phies indicate that the narratives taken into account for discussion might be of a later day origin. Though nothing could be found detailing the methods of the construction of prayer-halls. it would possibly not be out of context to surmise that certain novelties were added to the halls only to show a difference from the dwelling houses built of bamboo, timber and thatch. Such differences were evident from the apsidal front in Upper Assam and the bow roofed 'bhanj-ghar' in Kamrupa areas, One thing. however was common to all prayer-halls that they are all three roofed.

The main portion or body of the Namghar is called the 'Kirttan Ghar', where daily prayers are conducted. Here 'Kirttan' is meaningful to the context that 'Kirttanam' is an appellative of Hindu temple too. However. the common practice of construction of a 'Kirttan ghar' in Upper Assam and the 'Bhanj—ghar' in Lower Assam indicates the form of an elephant. Indian Silpa text

mentions a 'Kunjara' type of Hindu architecture. However, in the Namghar in Assam might have a genuine source of inspiration in the very form of elephant common to local flora. The constructional pattern of Namghar presents a hemispherical roof at one end of the hall. It is composed of eight triangular frames, the apexes meetnig at one point, the eight bases are on a lower edge and when covered with thatch, the eight sides appear merged into a semi-circle giving an apsidal shape to the building. The two ends of the semi-circle when extended parallely till they reach the 'Manikuta', gives a general base-plan of the entire hall. The hall however, is not constructed totally depending on the said semi-circle. The hemispherical composition at one end is a kind of beautification to the building. It is significant to note here that the planning of this portion slightly differs from the planning of the entire building and here a pair of posts are placed at a slightly tapering position away from the lines of posts of the main building. There are generally seven spans in a Namghar, though this number can be extended to nine or thirteen. There are eight pairs of posts in a seven spanned hall. The pair of posts behind the 'Simhasana' (The lion seat) are not taken into account to interpret symbolic meanings representing fourteen guardian deities, associated with the remaining fourteen posts including the two under the rounded roof. It has been mentioned that the roof forming a hemisphere has eight frames. These frames spreading like palm-leaves are knotted at one point, so that they all merge into a single entity. In order to achieve that existance the apexes of the frames are placed over a wooden frame called 'kaccapa' (The Tortoise-an incarnation of God) having holes over it to provide interlacing. There is a thousand petalled lotus made of wood below the 'kaccapa', All ropes interlacing the frames with the 'kaccapa' stick closely to the lotus-frame and thereby give an effect of a single entity. The 'Bhanj-ghar' in Lower Assam too has a speciality.The roof has to be like the back of an elephant and the edges of the roof-leaves must be sharp like the bow. There is a clear symmetry between the rafters and the roof-edges there. The apsidal form of the Namghar is accepted as the traditional architectural pattern of the Assamese school, while the form of the 'bhanj-ghar' is an issue for debates among scholars for its inclusion in an indigenous school.

The Namghar or the prayer-hall comprises of three parts : the Karapat or the lich-gate (Bacora), the Kirttan-ghar and the Manikuta. The institution of Sattra includes residential quarters of the devotees and the 'Rangolicora' in the campus. Some people conceive of the 'Rangolicora' as a separate structure constructed a little away, parallel to the 'Kirttan ghar' and used for performing the festivities like the Do'la festival. In the Dakashinpata Sattra, the Rangolico'ra is there at the very entrance to the Kirttan-ghar. The Rangalico'ra erected at the entrance to the Bardowa Than had a plinth lower than the Kirttan ghar and it was there that the womenfolk used to hold their prayers. The temple called Do'la at Bardowa is known as the Yatrara Do'la evidently signifying its association with festivals and dramatic performances. It was built by Srimanta Sankardeva himself during the 15th century A.D., and it is at present about a mile away from the Than of Bardowa. In the sattras like Sundaridiya and Barpeta, there are Mathas besides the Do'la

mandapas near the Namghar. The preachers used to live in such Mathas and from there they imparted religious discourses and teachings to the disciples.

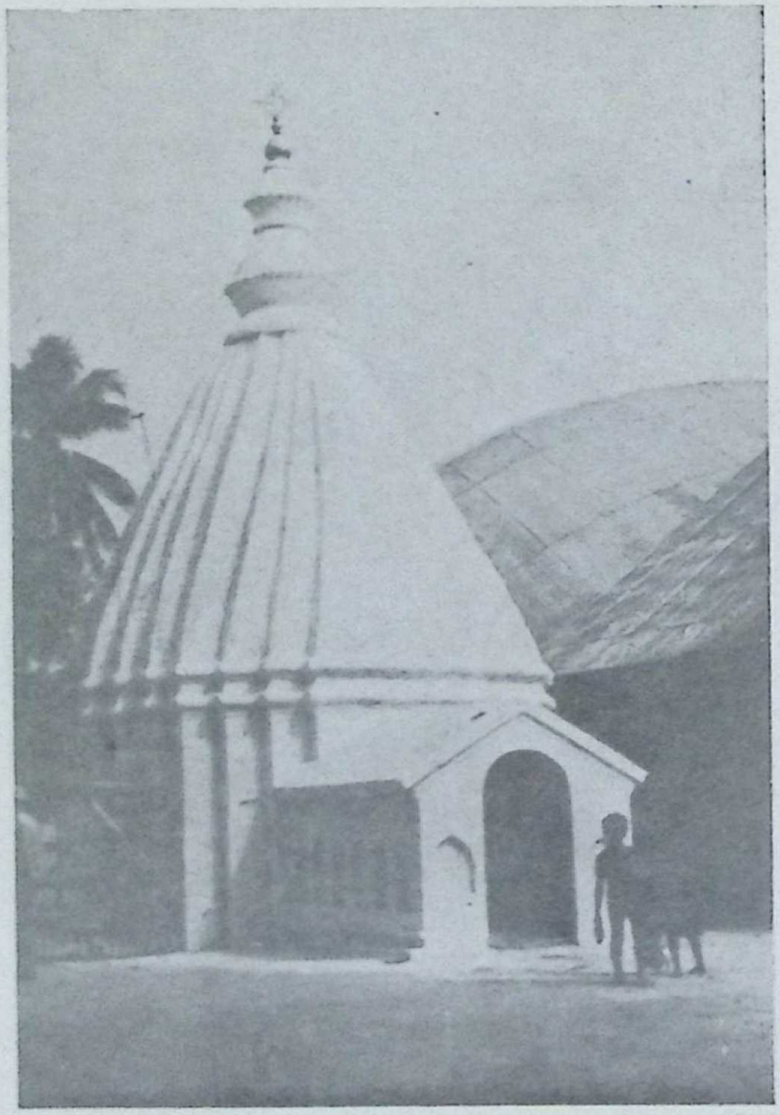
It is not easy to give a date as to when the vast institution known now as the Namghar came into being, but the Rangiyal Ghar erected at Barpeta in the days of Madhavadeva might have been its origin. It was, of course, recorded in the biographical works that the great Saint Sankardeva had provisions for the functions like Kirttan, reading of the Bhagavata and other religious discourses in his own residence. A few years after the great Saint left for his heavenly abode, Thakur Ata requested Madhavadeva for permission to erect a large house for the demonstration of Natua Yatra or dance and dramatic performances in order to attract people to the fold of the Bhakti cult and for performing daily prayers as well. But Madhavadeva declined on the plea that it was not sanctioned by his Guru, Sankardeva. However, coming to Barpeta at the instance of his disciples, Madhavadeva felt the need of sufficient space particularly for the three functions like prayer, indoctrination and also for cooking meals and himself had expressed the idea of a small Hari-mandir to serve his purpose. His wishes resulted in the making of the celebrated Rangiyal Ghar at Barpeta with all the decorations of 'hingula' (vermilion) and 'haital' (yellow arsenic) pigments, gold and silver paintings and creeper designs on the door-leaves. Rangiyal Ghar has almost the same meaning as that of a stage or a theatre house in which practices like dancing and singing are carried on. It has became a common practice till today that all kinds of orchestrations of the Bayana (drummers) and Gayana (vocal artistes) take place in the Namghar as do the dance and traditional dramatic performances of the Natuwas. Kirttan and discourses are also held there in the Namghar. Thus the present Namghar or the prayer-hall can easily be said to have had its origin in the Rangiyal Ghar or the theatre-house proper.

As pointed out by Stella Kramrich that the Kunjara variety of Hindu architecture might have certain influence of the Buddhist Caityas. The architectural design of the Namghar and other parapharnalia of the establishment, according to K.L. Barua, could bear certain Buddhist influences. Whatever be the origin of the plans and the degree of exotic influences thereon, the narrative discourses as to the structural patterns of the Namghar suggest spiritualistic and symbolic meanings in the entire complex. Some of the discourses are mentioned below :—

1) According to one discourse the Namghar represents the Lord in his incarnation of the Great Tortoise. The tortoise is the symbol of might and it is ascribed to the bed covered by the plinth area of the Namghar, which is also considered as the Vaikuntha (heaven) and the sanctum-sanctorum is the culmination of the Pankaja Vilasa or Valaha, the last one among the seven Vaikunthas.

The roof of the Namghar, in fact, looks like the shell covering the back of the tortoise. The apsidal front resembles almost the cartilaginous shell of the specis in its semi-circular form. Explaining the narrative it is said that the Namghar should possess two doors at the eastern end and one in the apsidal front representing the claws and the back part of the tortoise. We can also take the tortoise motif

THE KIRTAN GHAR at Barpeta Satra—foundations at the hands of Mathuradas Burha Ata, foremost disciple of Madhavadev.



MATH in the Barpeta Satra complex. The 'Nam Ghosa' is installed here at the sanctum—sanctorum.

as a symbol of perseverance needed by the devotees in their pursuit of Bhakti.

2) Another lore describes the Namghar as the Kalpa-Vriksha, the wish fulfilling tree of the celestial region. It is said that the fourteen branches of the tree are the fourteen pillars of the Namghar.

The Bhagavata is referred to by Madhavadeva in his Namghosa as the celestial Kalpataru, whose fruit is Lord's name par-excellance. Kalpataru is said to have three manifestations. The one in the Vaikuntha or the abode of the Lord is the Lord himself. The second and the third manifestations are conceived as Dharmavriksha and Mayavriksha respectively. The kalpavriksha represeuting the Lord of the heaven has yoga, dana (bounty) and tapasya as its bark, the five gross elements its roots, the eight corners its wealth like Anima, Laghima etc, nine varieties of Bhakti its branches, thes lokas of the eighteen Puranas as leaves, while the three gunas as its flowers with pollens of eighty names of God and the siddha munis move round these like bees. The buds and the fruit thereof are the ten names par-excellance of the Lord and the Harinama respectively. It is significant to have a comparison of the Namghar aptly with the Kalpavriksha, because it is the only place where the names of the Lord are chanted and recited to the fullest of satisfaction.

3) One narrative conceives of the bed or area covered by the plinth of the Namghar as Ananta, the Endless One or the Great Serpent on which the Lord uses to relax. The three roofs are the symbols of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. It is believed that the temple of Lord Visnu in the Goloka Vaikuntha is of round shape and thus the roof over the gateway of the Namghar is built accordingly. The members of the Goloka Vaikuntha sing the praise of God generally sitting in a circle, that too is a reason why the roof of the Namghar has to have a curvilinear front.

4) According to another narrative the Namghar is compared with the human body. too. The Anadi Patana composed by Sankardeva says that the human body is the microcosmic reflection of the macrocosm. The microcosm is the abode of all the twentyfour tattvas or the principles enumerated in Sankhya. The Namghar represents the macrocosm in its microcosmic form. There can be four parts in a Namghar as the body : the head, the heart, the navel region and the feet. The head represents the crown or the place divine, the heart is the place for the Bhagavata conceived of as the Bangmaya murtti of the Lord, while the navel region is the place for chanting hymns by the devotees in praise of Him after due submission at the feet. The company of the saintly ones, according to the Bhagavata, is the only source of divine solace. The Namghar is the best place for such a congregation of saintly persons,

The comparison of the Namghar with the vast universe is much more appealing and sound as a theory. The idea of a Vastu Purusa is imaged in the Hindu temple too. According to Stella Kramrich the Vastu Purusa is "the universal essence, the principle of all things, the Prime Person whence all originate". As such the expression of human body in relation to macrocosm associated with the Namghar is convincing and the theory itself displays a symbolism having broader perspective along with a national exposure.

There are a few other narratives conveying spiritual ideas attached to the con-

struction of the Namghar. All these ideas containing significance of their own lead one to surmise that the Namghar or the prayer hall cannot be isolated from the accompanying religious ideology. Spiritualism associated with the Namghar had its source in the way of life of the people who showed commonness of aims in their pursuit of Bhakti.

In planning the base of the Namghar the length is generally taken at thrice the breadth, The post heights are taken at two and half times the height of the main priest or the headman of the village. Some take it at 216 angulis and the posts on the sides at 108 angulis.

The site selection also has a tradition. There are various methods of testing the eligibility of a land site for a Namghar. One such is to lit an open-wick lamp and put it on a spot cleaned for the purpose. If the flame remains steady and does not go off the site is found correct. Another method is to place a particular number of rice grains each on the four corners of the site-to-be and a lamp lit is placed at the centre in the evening and left there overnight. If the grains are found in the same number at the four corners the next morning, the site is selected. In yet another method, the proposed site is tilled twentyone times and mustard seeds are broadcast so that all evil spirits would leave the place. Similar methods are applied in selecting the sites for Hindu Temples also.

A good site for the Kirttan Ghar is always prepared. A method is followed to find out a good site. The entire bed of the proposed Kirttan Ghar is divided into eight equal parts. Each part is allotted to one Vasu and thus all the eight parts suggest for the allocation of eight Vasus. Now it is necessary to make a total of the length already measured out with the breadth and adding the number 3 to it, the sum is to be divided by the number 8 representing the Vasus. If the result is 7, then the bed is reckoned the best suitable for the construction of a Kirttan Ghar, because the number 7 being the position of a danseuse would yield happiness and merriment for ever. The present bed of the Kirttan Ghar of Barpeta is said to have the seventh position.

If we look back to the Indian Temple architecture of the past, one thing comes out very clear. Through the ages and changes in stone structures, the sculptors and artisans have left clear marks of their skill and sense of beauty. As soon as stone works yielded place for the burnt bricks, the faces of the structures changed and art works also saw a decline in their grace and style. In Assam too, the Namghars built of bamboo and timber diminished in size and height from the brick-built temples of the Ahom age. These also lacked in glamour. One of the reasons may be that the Namghars were built by the people on their own and without any royal patronage. besides that, the kings did not allow the commoners to build their houses with bricks and mortar. On the other hand, glamour is almost a taboo in Vaisnavism. Adding a veranda to the Namghars was never thought of as that might indicate a regal style In Vaisnavism it is simply submission of one's body and soul at the feet of the Almighty. Keeping with such humility, the Namghars too were built in bare and simple style.

Though glamourless in architectural styles, the wood-carvings and paintings on the door-frame and the door—leaves and

the like, give indication of the vision of the devices about things of beauty. The Nam ghars at Barpeta, Sundaridiya. Bardowa. Samaguri in Nagaon and also Samaguri in Upper Assam, Kamalabari and several others still preserve beautiful works of art of old days. It is worthwhile to note here that Vaisnavism in Assam does not sanction worship of idols. Each and every Namghar in Assam con tain images of mythological figures. which however, according to a text are but manifestations of eighty types of Bhakti without least inclination of idolatry. Apart from sculptured images there are door-leaves, door frames. wall-plaques. simhasanas (Lion-seats) with images and designs on relief. The last one carries paintings too.

Of all decorations the ornamentation on the doors and door-leaves appeals most Doors are made of wood with carved designs. They are also ornamented with brass circles of various sizes and distributed symmetrically over the surface. At times doors are found to have been covered with huge brass sheets with images and designs embossed thereon. Ornamenations on the doors include flowers and creepers, legends and myths carved from the life and deeds of Lord Krisna as depicted in the Bhagavata and sometimes also of Rama. The carvings on the leaf of a door found in a celebate's residence at Sundaridiya Sattra show a bird feeding its young ones and the latter openning their mouths. The door-leaves at one of the quarters at Barpeta show the five Pandavas in relief. Doors at the Ganakakuchi and Patbausi Namghars have designs in brass-work and they include legends of Krisna and the Kadamba tree, Vastraharana. gopis' bathing, fourhanded Visnu, a boat with makara-motif, the two folded lotus and the images of the Lord's incarnation like Varaha, Kurma Matsya, Narasimha. Sri Bodha and Sri Rama. Similarly, with more skilled works, the doors in tne Namghars were ornamented and stylised. Bardowa preserves three wooden door-frames of the last century. Here stylisation is very much appealing to the beholders. One of the door-frames has the Makara-motif on both sides and the neck -part of each of them helps the sakhas to branch out. The motif of Makara (also called Magara) is a peculiar delineation with an elephant's trunk and a fish motif in the cavity of its mouth. It has wings and ornate tilaka on its forehead. The door-frames at Bardowa are ached ones, locally known as Mehraji, a word that might have been derived from Mihrab of Arabic origin. The arch is also stylised with cusps and the frame including the thresho'd is profusely decorated with fioral designs, geometric patterns and arabesques.

The old Namghar at Bardowa had a number of wooden posts on which were carved various images. The carvings aptly display the skill of the artists and their knowledge of forms of their vision. These forms are primitive in their expression and always appear like totem-poles. The said Namghar preserves an image of Visnu in His Trivikrama aspect. The image comes from the latter part of the 18th century A. D. It was carved out of a single piece of wood, on which inmates and door -keepers were also carved along with the Makarika and the Vyala-torana and above all, the Kirttimukha at its apex. The image of Visnu exhibits Tibeto-Burmese physiognomy and Visnu is seen wearing ornaments local to Assam.

Wooden plaques are a unique part of the Namghar decoration. The plaques are placed at various spots according to the

The Oldest Masjid in Assam

RANGAMATIR MASJID

Panbari on the National Highway and about thirteen Kilometres east of Gouripur in the Dhubri district, has the pride of privilege of holding the earliest extant Masjid of the State The credit of its erection is given to Hussain Shah (AD 1493-1519), the Governor of Bengal, who, after his annexation of Kochbehar and Western Assam, established his headquarters at Lalmati or Rangamati for the local people. The archaeological ruins here consist of an Idgah-wall, the plinth of a Magazine house, the ruins of a housing establishment, which, most probably was the administrative complex and the masjid in question.

That the Masjid belongs to the pre-Mughal period can be readily recognised from its typical architectural features. It is a living mosque and is in perfect shape, attracting devotees to the daily prayers.

SOME SIVA TEMPLES OF KAMARUPA

—by Shri Tirthanath Sharma

There are several Siva temples in Kamarupa. There were many more in ancient times. Some of the siva temples referred to in the Yogini Tantra are now burried under the earth. Chance incidents sometimes reveal informations about some. People have come across siva-lingams while digging for various purposes. Leaving these aside, the number of such temples where 'nitya pujas' are conducted even now are also not very small in number. Facts and details about these will offer considerable knowledge about the religious trends in ancient Kamrupa. We shall discuss about a few of them in this write-up.

In Assam. particularly in Kamrupa (district), the existing siva-sthanas can be divided into two categories. In some of them siva is worshipped as 'ardhanaariswara' and in the others only as 'siva' The ones where siva is worshipped as 'ardhanaariswara', siva remains either in the 'linga' or the 'peetha' forms. There are no 'linga's in the temples with the peetha forms, but 'peethas' only. There are systems of offering oblations of cooked food with meat or fish in the temples where Siva is worshipped as 'ardhanaariswara'. The main item for such oblations is pigeon-meat. At places duck-meat or meat from a castrated goat also are offered. There are differences in the manner of worship too. Oblations in the temples where only 'Siva' is worshipped, are vegetarian. Such oblations are generallv composed of cooked rice, pulses, curried vegetables, kichidi or simply rice and ghee. Grams, moong, bananas, sugar-cane and the like form the raw oblations at all places. The 'dhyana-mantra' differs from temple to temple. There are some particular reference to the temple itself in the said mantra, in some cases. The difference occurs in the 'dhyana-mantra' depending on the name of the deity and its 'gunas'. The name gives an idea of the gunas. Some of these will be clear in the following discussion about a few of the temples in Kamarupa.

MANIKARNIKESWARA

This temple is situated at the eastern most part of Kamrupa with its five sacred places. The siva-site is the eastern boundary of the 'pancha-tirtha'. The extent of these five 'tirthas' is 'aamaneh maniparyantam' that is, from the Manikut hills (near Hajo) to the Manikarnikeswara hills. This area is the seat of the five sacred places or tirthas. We begin with this Manikarnikeswara in the east. Manikarnikeswara is also called Manikarneswara. The stone inscriptions refer to it as 'maniswara maheswara'—saying "manigirivare sri sri maniswara maheswarasya rucira mathamimamaracayat'.

The Manikarnikeswara siva temple is on top of a non-too-high hill in the eastern parts of Gauhati. The hill is on the bank of the Brahmaputra. The confluence of Barnadi, and Pushpabhadra is at its feet. Pushpabhadra is no longer to be seen now, it was a full river once. This being the confluence of the Barnadi and Pushpabhadra and the Brahmaputra, the place is known as triveni sangam. Manikarnikeswara siva presides over here.

There is a meaning behind naming the siva at this place as Manikarnikeswara. The name has some connections with tantrik meditations of siva. We shall be brief as it would not be possible to go for a wider discussion here.

Tantras say there are six nerve joints in a human body, these are called sadcakras. Sometimes called Padma too. The highest cakra is the 'sahasra', it is situated at the 'brahmarandhra'. This is also called the 'sahasra-padma'. The site is the confluence of the three nerves 'ida', 'pingala' and the 'susumna' and thus is the triveni sangam. The devout worshipper raises the kundalini and passes the cakras one by one to reach the sahasra-padma and then merges into siva. Siva sits at the centre of the sahasra-padma or manikarnika. This place is also called the 'kailasa' of the body. Life merges here with siva for all devotees. Tho siva here is Manikarnikeswara. The siva at the confluence of the three veins 'ida' 'susumna' and 'pingala' and on the sahasra-lotus is Manikarnikeswara. The temple is thus situated at the said confluence on the banks of the Brahmaputra. The 'dhyna-mantra' of this siva referes to the Sahasra-padma seated siva.

The temple is an ancient one. The ruins scattered about have all the tell tele signs. The carvings and designs indicate that the temple cannot be later than the eleventh century. The top could have been ruined due to an earthquake. On it the Ahom king Rajeswara Singha had one temple built through Dasaratha Duara in 1677 AD. That too has dwindled through the ages. The slate bricks of this structure are to be seen strewn around the yards. Some have been taken away by the local people and used them. The temple priests do not seem to be anxious about rebuilding the temple. The place of worship is now covered with a few sheets of roofing. It is not known if the daily pujas are performed there these days.

GOPESWARA DEVADUAR

To the north of Gauhati, about two miles this way from Baihata Chariali, there is a huge block of stone that looks like a temple on the side of the highway. A pond is there in front of it. There is a cave under the stone and there in the cave lies a siva-peetha called Gopeswara. This is a natural temple inside a natural cave. The huge block of stone was sometimes used for quarrying stones and the temple received some revenue out of it.

The temple cave is now a habitat of bats. It is these bats that sing the glory of siva. Sometimes snakes are also seen adorning the peetha. The priests perform pujas without any fear. On the approach to the temple a small place is to be seen fenced on all sides and three statues are kept there. We were told that they are of dasabhuja durga Lakshmi and Saraswati. On a closer scrutiny it was found out that

the central was, in fact, the statue of an asta-bhuja durga. The priests cannot be blamed They are aware of only ten-handed durga statues,. Asta.bhuja durga statues are hard to come by in Assam. At places outside Assam the eight-handed deity is found in plenty. The one here in Assam is thus a rare find and deserves preservation The statue on the left is of Basudev, Bisnu and not Lakshmi. Three of the four hands hold 'sankha , 'cakra' and gada' while the fourth, the lower right hand is in the blessing pose. It is difficult to guess how the priest identified the statue as that of Lakshmi in spite of all the definite symbols. The third one could not be identified. Very possibly it was either Ganga or yamuna of the temple and later removed.

The peetha is inside the cave. A large domed brass cover hides it from general view. Pilgrims are not supposed to 'see' the peetha, they can only touch it. It was learnt afterwards from an old priest that the peetha is composed of a pair of two stone-slabs, one embracing the other. Must be symbolic of the embracing posture of siva and parvati.

To meet the cost of the daily worship of of Gopeswara siva, and on directions from king Siva Sinha. Tarun Duara Barphukan arranged to allocate lands and grants by a deed engraved in copper plate. The plate was signed in the 'sasa-dhara-rasa-tarka-harinanka sake' i. e, in the Saka 1661. King Siva Simha ruled from Saka 1636 to 1666. The grant as per the copper plate was 'pai' 15¼. There were separate allocation for the daily recitation of 'Nilakantha' and 'Mahimna' stotras. The plate also had mention separately of the catradhar, camardhara and the athparia. The quantities earmaked for the daily oblations were rice 4½ seers and pulses ½ seer. Meat oblations are no longer a daily routine these days. If brought by pilgrims only, pigion-meat oblations are sometimes offered. There was an ancient custom of offering 'puris' in the evening oblation. These puris were placed in small earthen pots. The system reminds one of the offer of 'kapal-puro-dash habi' in yagnas of the past. Purodash or pies were offered in varying numbers of 'kapalas' or earthen plates, the numbers depending on the deity. The term 'paratha' has come down from this 'puro-dash'. The word is vedic and has come to our language through the persian.

There are two Siva temples bearing the name of Gopeswara in Assam. One is at Singari in Darrang district and the other here at Deva duar in Kamrup district. Gopeswara generally means or refers to Krishna. How then Siva came to be known as Gopeswara ? Why Siva is called the master of gopas ?

Gopa means go-palaka or goalas, but that is only an extended meaning. Gopa means the protector. One who protects is also the keeper. Thus Gopa has come to mean gopalaka or goala. The two terms fall in the class.

Gopa may also has come from the root 'goop', meaning hiding or hidden. Remaining hidden from the general view or out of one's reach may also be the deity gopeswara. There are temples after 'Gupteswara' Siva too in some places. Here the name may imply again the secret stance of siva in the 'ardhanariswara' form. The meditation of the 'ardhanaariswara' siva is a secret form of worship. But that is only a metaphysical explanation. There

are some different historical explanations.

At one time the gopas of Mathura and nearby places, used to worship the sun. The sun is described in the vedas as Rudra. In the Rudra adhyaya of the Yajur Veda, Rudra is worshipped as the main deity of the gopas : asau yo avasarpati nilagribo vilohitah utainam gopas adrishanna drishannu daharyah sa dristo mridayati nah : Yajur 16/7. (meaning : that nilakantha and red hued god, who moves around from morn till night and who is looked at by all the gopas and the women going to fetch water, bestows happiness on us all.)

There must be some historical reason for this reference of gopas in this hymn. Otherwise mention could have also been made of the 'small ones' like the 'nishada punjistha mrigayuk' (hunter) or 'swani' (the dog eaters) about whom references have been made in the same adhyaya. That would have justified Sayana's explanation that 'the small ones also can see.' This special mention of the gopas in this hymn is because of the link between the gopas and the worship of the sun-god in the form of Rudra.

There was a relation between the worship of the Rudra and the Gopas and gopa-women. The reference to gopas and gopa-women together brings to the mind of some secret form of joint worship. It may have later turned into the joint worship of the couple Radha and Krishna in later ages and culminated in the Rasakrida of Krishna. But then the blue and red forms of Rudra of the Yajurveda era as seen by the gopas remained as Gopeswara siva. This combined form of the blue and red Rudra then was worshipped as the 'ardhanaariswara' form of Siva and Durga.

There are or were a few siva temples named after the qualifying adjectives used for Rudra in the Rudra-adhyaya of the Yajur veda in Assam. Some of these are Tamreswara, Pingaleswara, Kapardiswara, Heleswara (later called Haleswara) and so on.

PINGALESWARA

Karara is a place about 27 miles North of Gauhati. Pingaleswara temple is about 4 miles from this place to the East. The village too is named after the deity. The temple is situated at the end of the village with a huge tank in front. Siva here is in the linga form and is worshipped in the name of Pingaleswara.

Almost all the temples in Kamrupa are situated at hill-tops with a river at its foot and surrounded by decent landscapes. Pingaleswara is an exception. It stands in an open field at the end of a village. A few huge trees however give a nice view with the tank under their shades. It is an ancient temple. Originally it was built of stones. Some ruins are still visible. Many of the stone pieces have either gone under grain-house pillars or to door steps of the village folk around the temple. Whatever can be seen lying in the temple campus, vividly displays the skill of the artisans who carved them. The lotus designs, creepers and the statues carved in those stones indicate the age of the temple as of the ninth or the tenth century. Considering that the temple is in an open field, on the outskirts of a village, the Pingaleswara siva can be imagined as a self evolved linga. Had it been placed there under orders of a king, the temple would have been built as was the others, on a secluded site like a hill-top. The linga might have been there from a very old time and was worshipped there without a temple built over it for ages. Then

the linga might have peen excavated by chance from under the ground. The last known structure was built under the aus. pices ot King Siva Singha. It was this king who settled the temple with land and grants and made a copper-plate deed to that effect. It is learnt that the copper plates referred to a few muslim mendicants as 'sevaites' of this temple. A muslim village is there nearby and some of its residents staked a claim as the descendents of these fakirs', but could not succeed at last.

The name Pingaleswara is also that of the vedic Rudra. The 'rudra-adhyaya hymn "asau yastamrah uta bavruh supingalah" describes rudra as 'pingala'. Pingaleswara too is ardhanaariswara siva. Meat oblations are offered in the pujas. Pilgrims from far off places come here during winter. They bring pigions and other materials for oblations with them. All the pilgrims partake of the prasada together on the courtyard. The income from the temple grants very well sufficed for the expenses in connection with the daily worship and oblations till the Government took away the same. The management of the temple is now in a fix for the paucity of funds.

The old temple structure gave away sometime. No new structure came up in its place. The place where the lingam stands is hollow hole from which there is a small tunnel leading to a well and all the water flows down to the well. The well now is damaged. A tin roof stood over the lingam for some time. The temple committee has dismantled it and started construction of a new temple. The work is suffering again for the same reason, paucity of funds.

SIDDHESWARA

At one end of Sualkuchi, another village in Kamrupa, and on top of a small hillock stands the Siddheswara siva temple. The surrounding scenery is very beautiful. Siva lingams are scattered all around the temple yard. The temple is built of brick-slates. Plants have sprung out of cracks on the walls of the temple now and is in a decaying stage. The entire campus can be turned into a beautiful spot with a little care.

The deity of the temple is Siddheswara siva. There is a full-size and beautiful statue of 'basudeva' stowed aside and remain unworshipped. This basudeva must have been one of the 'panchayatana'. There are both 'ganesha' and 'durga'. The other statues must have been buried around. The basudeva image apperas to have been the main deity here from its size and share. The linga will be hardly two feet high, the Basudeva stands about six feet. It can easily be surmised that there was a visnu temple side by side of the siva temple once. That has been destroyed by time. The stone pieces and the ort work thereon adds strength to this idea. The designs on these stones takes them to the twelfth century.

There are still a few brahmin families belonging to the 'basottar' school in Sualkuchi now who came and settled there during the reign of king Ratnapal. The temple priests belong to this family. The 'basottar' school of brahmins used to worship ganesha as the chief deity and were known as 'ganapatya' brahmins. This deity is still worshipped at the other end of the

village. The Siddheswara siva temple was built either by Ratnapala or Dharmapala. The stone works found there also lead us to that date.

The new siva temple was named after the family deity 'siddhidata' ganesa of the 'basottar' school of brahmins as 'siddheswar siva'. Unlike many other temples in the district, the deity in this temple is not that of 'ardhanaariswara'. The pujas here are performed with vegetarian oblations of vaisnavite forms of worship. The daily oblations here have a speciality. Pure ghee, ginger and rock-salt (saindhava salt), only these three items go into the cooking of 'joha' rice. Plain but have a memorable taste.

Sualkuchi was subjected to muslim invasion on several occasions. It may be for this reason that the images have teil-tale marks of destruction on the faces and not on the other parts of the bodies. The village was under muslim rule for some time during the reign of Aurangjeb. After they were driven out, King Siva Singha had the present temple built through Dasarath Duara. The constructions were not of a high standard and the temple is in a stage of decay. Local people must come up with plans of a proper re-construction of the temple and also of a beautification of the surroundings so as to preserve an invaluable relic.

GRAHATMAKA SIVA--NAVAGRAHA.

On the Eastern part of the city of Gauhati and on top of another hill is Navagraha temple. The Kalika Purana describes the hill as 'citrachal.' The temple is more famous as that of the nine 'grahas' and not as that of siva. Eight grahas surround the Sun, placed at the center and all the grahas are in the form of lingams. Though the nine grahas are worshipped here, the deities are treated as 'grahatmaka siva.' The stone inscriptions at the entrance to the temple, put there by King Rajeswara Singha also says, it is only 'grahatmaka siva.'

"Navagrahatmaka sivopari navaratnak-hyamathamimacikara-dwedadrirasendu sake." refering to Tarun Duara Barphukan having had the temple built under orders of Sri Sri Swarganarayana Rajeswara Singha in Saka 1674.

No Purana could be recalled as having referred to siva in the form of 'grahas.' Nor is it known if any other scripture describes siva as such. Yet the concept of siva in the form of graha is very old. The Surya and Rudra in the vedas are the same entity though worshipped under different names depending on the stage of worship and also the 'gunas.' Rudra retained a specific and separate identity in later ages but yet the one-ness concept has not been removed altogether in many cases. Surya is the chief of the grahas, the other grahas having obtained their forms from the Surya. If Surya Rudra is one Surya Siva also must be one. Viewing from this angle, the grahas are but differut forms of siva. A book of hymns was discovered in the Bali island of Indonesia, where one of the hymns salute siva as the master grahas (graheswara). The book is not here with us, graheswara" is found in a book retained

at Bali in Indonesia. In India the graheswara form of siva is almost forgotten. No so in this state however. A few ancient concepts of the deities are still there in Assam. From that angle the worship of 'grahatmaka lingas' at Navagraha must be prevelant from an early age. The oneness of Rudra Surya is a vedic concept, the concept of Surya-siva derived from the vedas also must be as ancient.

—o—

English rendering, **Atulananda Goswami.**
(Original Assamese article published in the Kamrup Sahitya Parisad journal KAMARUPA—1972)

KAMAKHYA

Atulananda Goswami

"Kamakhyacca mahatyam sarvavedarthasanmatam brahmatvam brahmana praptam vishnutvancca maya punah sivatvancca sivenaiba kamakhyayah prasadatah.

"Brahma attained His brahmatva Siva His sivatva and I my vishnutva" said Vishnu, "from the munificence of Kamakhya."

Hindu Assam is identified with this deity. This state has for a very long time been called the 'desh of Kamrup Kamakhya'. Scores of legends have been woven around this entity and never-ending streams of pilgrims and visitors come to the shrine everyday.

Legends and myths have not only multilied through the ages, they have overlapped in such a manner that it is not possible to place them chronologically one after the other. Characters have mingled events mixed up.

The one that has come down the ages and most popularly accepted is like this.

The spouse of Siva could not resist the temptation of going to her father's place to attend the Rajasuya yajna being performed by him though she was prohibited from so going by her husband. She was unwelcome at her father's too and the father, Daksha, did not care to hide his feelings. Siva was rebuked in very strong terms. The humiliation was too much for the sati and after a swoon, she breathed her last at the very yajna site.

When Siva was informed of the tragedy, his third eye opened up in extreme rage and he rushed to the spot. Destroyed the yajna and picked up the dead body of the sati. He was so overwhelmed by the grief that he forgot his bearings and started wandering throughout the length and breadth of the 'world'. Vishnu was awe-struck. If Siva's agony takes him away from the ordained tasks, the world shall be exposed to a doom. So He decided to lighten Siva's burden and started severing the corpse on Siva's shoulder into pieces with Hisd iscuss. The pieces fell at different places of the 'world' and later came to be known as Peethas.

The genital part fell here on top of Nilacala, a hillock about 5 kilometres from the heart of the city of Guwahati.

The name of the hillock itself is said to have been derived from two sources. The one connected with the present legend says that the hillock went blue when the severed part of the sati's body fell on it and hence the term 'nila' was affixed to the term 'parbat' or hill, and also that the pains and agony of the entire affair had everything turned blue of.

A shrine was established on the spot

but without any image or icon. There is a block of stone and a cave wheron the symbol of the Yoni is sculped. A natural spring keeps the cave and the stone perpetually moist. That is the sanctum sanctorum of the famous temple.

The form of worship of the deity is said to have undergone changes from time to time. No fixed day or time is earmarked for the periodic worship of 'Kamakhya'. Kamakhya is the mother goddess and worshipped in the various forms known of Her. The cult and the various riruals performed throughout the year are all Tantric.

The two most famous scriptures extolling the glories of Kamakhya are the Kalika Purana and the Yogini Tantra. They interpret the deity in two different aspects. In the words of Dr. Banikanta Kakati "..... ....the two scriptures put divergent interpretations about the Yoni-circle as a symbol of sex and as a symbol of creation." and also "If the Kalika Purana gives an amorous interpretation of the origin of the Yoni- goddess, tho Yogini Tantra takes no notice of the myth and gives a different account stressing the creative symbolism of the Yoni"—The Mother Goddess Kamakhya, P. 35-36.

The two scriptures referred to, prescribe different hymns for the contemplation of the goddess (KP-143-184/62 ; YT—77-85/7) and thus visualises Her in different forms and attire.

The most venerated festival of the shrine is 'Ambubaci', held in about July or exactly from the 7th day of Ashadha. The temple remains closed for three days, considered to the once in a year menstrual period of the mother goddess, The re-openning thereafter ensues a huge mela and festivities.

Durga puja is held as usual on the appointed days. Animal sacrifices are a common sight and ritual for these pujas. 'Manasa' the snake goddess is worshipped here every year on the last day of Sravana and attracts huge crowds of devotees.

There is however no trace of the designs and structure of the original temple. That was destroyed by Muslim invaders sometime in the sixteenth century. The present one was re-built by the King Naranarayana of Kamatapur or modern Coochbehar in northern West Bengal. The King added all the requisite paraphernalia of a Hindu temple. He had established a sect of priesthood by settling some.

Additions and alterations were also made by a few Ahom kings and gave land grants. These are evident from the various stone inscriptions around the temple complex,

Regarding the original constructions a story gained popularity and was evolved from the fancy that King Naraka, more about him a little later, was charmed by the beauty of the goddess Kamakhya and desired to have her as his spouse. She was in fact—*'navataruna sarira..... sisuravisamabastra sarvakameswari .....'*.... His advances disturbed the goddess and had to find a wily way and agreed to his proposal on conditions that the king should construct a temple, a tank and also a stone—laid path from the foot of the hillock to the temple—all within the night. The king became too inspired and immediately started the job. His pace startled the goddess and was afraid the king might have his promises kept. She therefore willed a cock to crow before day-break and much before the tasks were completed. The king, finding that he failed in his works gave up the idea of

taking Kamakhya as his bride. The path still remains, not fully laid and it is not possible to locate the temple built thus in the course of a night.

Later, when the Coch king Nara-narayana rebuilt the temple, he placed Kendu Kalai as the Chief priest of the temple. This priest somehow let it be known that the goddess used to dance in the nude at the time of the evening arati and strictly within closed doors. The king was fascinated and desired that he be shown this holy sight. Kendu Kalai agreed and asked the king to peep through a hole, dug in the walls of the temple, when the evening arati took place.

The goddess saw through the deception, got enraged and punished the priest with death. She also cursed the king along with all his future progeny with dire consequences even if any one dared even cast his eyes towards the hill : It is said that none from the King's family, even today come to this area out of fear.

This may have infiltrated into the minds of many other people in and around North Bengal, for I have personally met some people who would not cross the Brahmaputra into the land of the mother goddess.

The king Naraka is said to be the first ruler of Assam at a time when this place was experiencing a transition from the non-aryan to the aryan tradition. Saivism was slowly being replaced by Saktism. The original inhabitants and rulers, the Kiratas, were vanquished.

But Naraka is a name that appears in different characters in the pages of various scriptures. The Ramayana refers to him as the king of Pragjyotisha at one place. The Mahabharata refers to him as a daitya and was killed at the hands of Krishna. The Harivamsa calls him a Bhauma or the son of Bhumi, the earth. The Vishnu Purana says that he was the son of Vishnu when He was the Boar incarnate.

The Kalika Purana then compiles a life sketch of Naraka. He was conceived by mother earth from Lord Vishnu. The mother placed the new born child at the fields of king Janaka of Mithila and the king found the infant in the same way he found Sita. The mother appeared in person and requested Janaka to rear the boy till a particular age.

When the boy came of age he was taken to Kamrupa by Vishnu and given to win the kingdom from the Kiratas. The Lord also saw to it that Naraka gets all the required objects needed by a mighty king including 'sakti' as powerful as fire itself. Naraka was also ordained to worship the source of all 'sakti,' the goddess Kamakhya and none else. *'mahadevim mahamayam jagannmatarambikam, kamakhyam tvam bina putra nanyadevam yajisyasi'* (KP).

To quote Dr. Kakati again, for his is the only book wherein he has taken pains to give extensive details of the mother goddess and his deliberations have not been refuted so far by any other scholar, ".....Naraka of Mithila was a political adventurer who established himself in power somewhere between 200--500 A. D. and introduced the Sakti cult and found in the local goddess Kamakhya, a manifestation of devine energy. After his death in tragic circumstances his name got mixed up with earlier legendary Naraka

of Pragjyotisha and the auothor of the Kalika Purana collected the salient features from both the legends and built up a unified and composite figure that strides across centuries." (MGK—29/30).

The striding across the centuries can also be attributed to the awe-inspiring faith in the Yoni-goddess. The glory of the goddess has not waned by time but has rather increassed day by day. No hindu visitor to this place has eskewed her and has made it a must to include in his programme of touring the area a visit to the shrine.

PRINCIPAL SATRAS IN ASSAM

Our readers have acquainted themselves with the Vaishnavite Satra institutions in Assam through the two articles by two eminent writers, Dr,Satyendra Nath Sarma and Dr. Naren Kalita.

The srtras were, at some time, divided into sub-sects within the very set-up and these sub-sects came to be known as 'Samhati's or 'Samprada's. There are four such sub-sects and are known as 'Brahma Samhati', 'Purusa Samhati', Kala Samhati' and 'Nika Samhati'.

"Because of the predominence of Brahmanical elements," says Dr. Sarma, "the sub-sects of Damodardeva and Harideva have been known as Brahma Samhati" (The Neo-Vaishnavite Movement and The satra Institutions of Assam-p69).

'Purusa Samhati' was founded by Purushottama Thakur, eldest grandson of Sankardeva. This 'samhati' regards and lays special emphasis on Sankardeva as the only guru.

'Kala Samhati' was set-up by Gopala Ata, a resident of Kaljhar in Kamrup, where he had his satra too.

'Nika Samhati' was founded by Mathuradas Ata and Padma Ata (Badala Ata), both prominent disciples of Madhavdeva.

A very exhaustive list of the satras in Assam was prepared by Dr. Sarma and appended it to his elaborate work referred to above. His sources were (1) District Gazeteers of Assam (1905), (2) Buranji Vivekaratna by Maniram Barbhandar Barua, (3) Santa Samprada by Govinda Dasa, (4) Etaka Mahantar Jhuna by Bibhunatha, (5) Bahi -vol I, Part ii (1912) and 'Pavitra Assam' Published by the Assam Sahitya Sabha.

We take advantage of this ready work, for the benefit of our readers, in giving hereunder the names of the principal satras. His words in this regard are.. "I have arranged the satras in alphabetical order under the four traditional groups, viz., (A) Brahma Samhati, (B) Kala Samhati, (C) Purusa Samhati and (D) Nika Samhati, Principal Satras of each group have been marked with asterisks. Almost all the satras of the Brahma Samhati are presided over by Brahmins. But in the other three Samhatis the member of Brahmins and non-Brahmin heads is roughly of equal proportions. Satras marked by (H) an (C) belong to the Haridevi and Caitanya sects"

Our list hereunder, are of the principal Satras only, out of the 380 satras listed by Dr. Sarma.

(A) BRAHMA SAMHATI.

Name of Satra	founder	time of foundation	location (District)
1. Adhar	Yadumanideva	1600-1625	Sibsagar
2. Auniati	Niranjanadeva	1654	Sibsagar
3. Bahari (H)	Harideva	1560-1580	Kamrup
4. Bainakuchi (H)	Jagannathadeva	1600-1625	Kamrup

Name of Stara	founder	time of foundation	location (District)
5. Cameri	Krishnadeva	1600-1625	Kamrup
6. Daksinpat	Vanamalideva	1653 AD	Sibsagar
7. Diphalu	Krishnachandra	1650-1675	Sibsagar
8. Garamur	Jayaharideva	1715-1744	Sibsagar
9. Govindapur	Bhagavandeva	1600-1625	Kamrup
10. Jagara	Harichandradeva	1600-1625	Kamrup
11. Kaihati	Kesava Bapu	1650-1700	Kamrup
12. Khudiya	Gopalo Misra	1575-1600	Kamrup
13. Kuruwabahi	Vamsigopaladeva	1600-1625	Sibsagar
14. Loca	Arjundeva	1600-1650	Kamrup
15. Mahara	Jagadananda	1650-1675	Sibsagar
16. Maenri (H)	Harideva	1560-1580	Kamrup
17. Patbausi	Damodardeva	1560-1590	Kamrup
18. Phutukacapari	. .	1675-1700	Sibsagar
19. Saudkuchi	Sarvananda	1650-1700	Sibsagar
20. Srihati	Hari Bapu	1600-1650	Kamrup
21. Vyahkuchi	Bhattadeva	1600-1625	Kamrup

(B) KALA SAMHATI

1. Ahataguri	Srirama Bapu	1625-1650	Sibsagar
2. Bahbari	Baryadumani	1600-1625	Sibsagar
3. Bhawanipur	Gopala Ata	1595-1620	Kamrup
4. Charaibahi	Murari Bapu	1625-1650	Sibsagar
5. Ceca	Ramai Atai	1650-1675	Sibsagar
6. Daukacapari	Jadavananda	1650-1675	Nowgong
7. Dihing	Sanatanadeva	1625-1650	Sibsagar
8. Dinjay	Aniruddhadeva	1600-1625	Lakhimpur
9. Gajala	Saru-Yadumani	1625-1650	Sibsagar
10. Hemarbari	Ramananda	1650-1709	Sibsagar
11. Ikarajan	Ramacandra	1625-1650	Sibsagar
12. Kaljhar	Gopala Ata	1600-1625	Kamrup
13. Silikhatal	Sanatanadeva	1650-1675	Sibsagar.

(C) PURUSA SAMHATI

1. Bardowa	Damodara Thakur	1650-1675	Nowgong
2. Bengena-ati	Murari	1625-1650	Sibsagar
3. Camaguri	Cakrapani	1660-1675	Sibsagar
4. Cupaha	Krishanacarana	1625-1650	Sibsagar
5. Dighali	Saramani	1650-1675	Sibsagar
6. Elengi	Bapukrishna	1630-1650	Sibsagar

7.	Janiya	Narayan Thakur	1575-1606	Kamrup
8.	Koamara	Anantaraya	1640-1675	Sibsagar
9.	Narowa	Damodar Ata	1650-1675	Sibsagar
10.	Pathausi	Sankaradeva	1550-1568	Kamrup
11.	Salaguri (i)	Ratnakara	1630-1660	Sibsagar
12.	Salaguri (ii)	Anantaraya	1650-1675	Sibsagar

(D) NIKA SAKHATI

1.	Barjaha	Kesavacarana Ata	1500-1625	Darrang
2.	Barpeta	Madhavadeva	1570-1590	Kamrup
3.	Bhela	Madhavadeva	1590-1596	Cooch-behar
4.	Camaria	Bar Vishnu Ata	1580-1620	Kamrup
5.	Heramda	Parbiya Atai	1595-1625	Kamrup
6.	Kaimari	Balorama Atai	1650-1700	Kamrup
7	Kamalabari	Padma Ata	1595-1625	Sibsagar

TEMPLE LANDS NOW ACQUIRED BY THE STATE

Almost all the temples and other religious places received ample patronages from the rulers and governors. These ranged from big funds, gold and silver ornaments, huge untensils, musical instruments to liberal land-grants as permanent sources of income for the temples. Such incomes were to sustain the priests as well, settled with the temples. Land grants were, at times, added by other devotees.

The lands were generally of two categories. 'Lakheraj' or rent free and 'nispikheraj' or half-rated lands. Priests and other 'sevaites' were entitled to hold and use such lands. Any lease or renting out was also to be made to 'sevaites' only.

The State have however, acqired, the temple lands and in return granted some annual grants to meet the cost of the daily worship.

We present here a list of important temples from which land were acquired. The quantities are given in Bighas, kathas and lessas ; a bigha measuring 1340 sq. metres approximately. A katha is one fifth of a bigha and a lessa is one twentieth of a katha,

	Name of the Temple.		Acquired qty. of land. B K L
1,	Navagraha Temple	....	499 — 1 — 13
2.	Ugratara Temple	...	1,233 — 0 — 12
3.	Hajo Madhab Temple	....	60,612 — 3 — 6
4.	Aswaklanta Temple		8,889 — 1 — 15
5.	Dirgheswar Temple	....	5,324 — 0 — 18
6.	Kamakhya Temple	....	24,906 — 0 — 8
7.	Umananda Devalaya	....	15,525 — 1 — 15
8.	Sukleswar Devalaya	....	5,405 — 2 — 4
9.	Chatrakar Devalaya	....	7,882 — 0 — 2
10.	Billeswara Devalaya	....	5,280 — 0 — 14
11.	Nagasankar Devalaya	....	993 — 3 — 5
32,	Mahavairab Temple	....	1,153 — 0 — 11
13.	Nandikeswar Devalaya	....	1,152 — 1 — 17
14.	Biswanath Devaiaya	....	791 — 4 — 18
15.	Halleswara Devalaya	....	958 — 2 — 5
16.	Siva Dol	....	68 — 1 — 3
17.	Vishnu Dol	....	95 — 0 — 11
18.	Devi Dol	....	90 — 1 — 9
19.	Burhi Gosani Devalaya	....	148 — 8 — 13
20.	Madhab Devalaya	...	655 — 2 — 1
21.	Tamreswar Devalaya	....	798 — 2 — 2
22.	Parihareswar Tempie	....	2,654 — 2 — 15
53.	Baneswar Devalaya	...	1,661 — 3 — 18
24.	Manikarneswar Devalaya	....	1,104 — 3 — 7
25.	Kalia Thakur Bigraha	....	1,504 — 1 — 17

A MONEY-SUIT OVER TEMPLE LANDS

"My Name is Sarifuddin son of S..... (illegible) mianh by caste muslim. My age is 50 years. I reside at Pub Jatia Bondapurgaon Patidarrang istrict Kamrup. My occupation is a land holder.

"I am not in possession of all the dags in suit, I don't know the numbers of the dags of which I am in possession of 2700 bighas of land. ....

On cross examination again :

"I took up over 1100 bighas of land at Bar Darangi Kuchi. I had to pay rent to the Doloi since 1317 B. S. at 514/ a year. I have not paid anything to the Doloi since 1317 B. S. ....

"I sometimes go home. * * * * I kept no zamabandi of my sub tenants. I have no chitha. I made no survey of the land.

"I went to the Mandal and got the area in my possession and in the possession of my sub tenants."

The above are extracts from a deposition made by the Defendant in the Civil suit No 7 of 1919, before Rai Bahadur, R. N. Phukan, Sub-Judge, Assam Valley Division at Gauhati. on 16th May. 1921.

The dispute was over the non-payment of land rents as agreed upon to the Doloi of Asvakranta Temple. There was a 'mounasi' pattah given from the Temple authorities but the same was anulled by the Court.

The Court of the Sub Judge, by its order dared 28th May. 1921, Decreed in fovour of the Temple Doloi in the following terms :

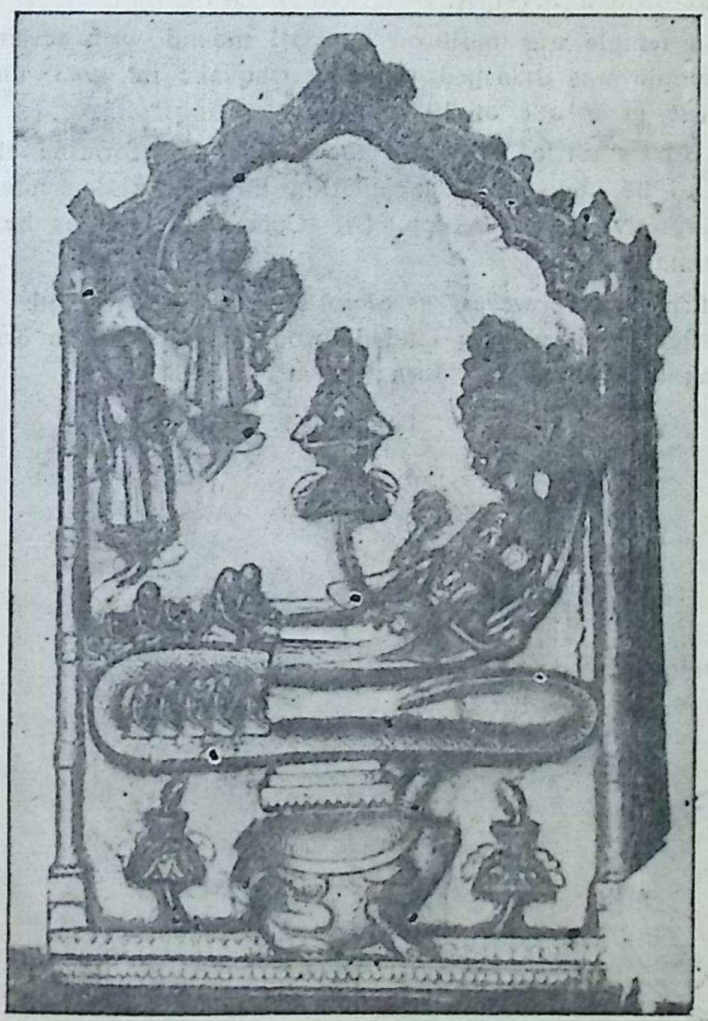
"* * * This suit being presented this 28th day of May, 1921, before Rai Bahadur Srijut Radhanath Phukan, M. A. B. L., Sub Judge, Assam Valley Division, for final disposal, in the presence of Babu Umacharan Sen, Pleader for the Plaintiff and Srijut Kamakhya Ram Barooah. Pleader the for Defendant, it is ordered that, of the claim the Defendant shall pay to the Plaintiff Rs. 1037-3 annas Rupees one thousand thirty seven and three annas along with expenses determined at Rs. 163-10-6 pais.

Given under my signature and seal this 28th May, 1921.

Sd/- R. N. Phukan
Sub-judge, A. V. D."

The Court order was in Assamese, while the depositions, both of the Plaintiff and the Defendant, were recorded in English, The certified copies of the documents are now with the present Doloi of the Temple, Shri Sashi Mohan Bhattacharya. All the documents are written in hand and many words are not properly legible. punctuation being a rarity.

EDITOR.



ANANTASHAYI NARAYAN VIGRAHA at Asvaklanta Temple—a very rare specimen of stone-sculpture with exquisitely fine details (P—15)

RANGANATHA DOL : (P. 31)

The Ranganatha Dol as described in our text, is now a living Siva temple, But this deity was installed there only as a companion deity to another temple of Vishnu (Ranganatha), erected by the King Rudra Singha in about the same time as Talatal Ghar was built. The twin complex was a rarity in itself, compared to the other temples built in and around Sivsagar.

The Ranganatha temple was built on a small mound with seven steps leading to its base, The temple was damaged by an earthquake in 1943 and was totally destroyed by the next great one of 1950.

The family of priests settled there by the king, for performing the daily rituals and worship, came to be known as 'Ranganathia Baruas', a descendant of which is Shri P. C. Barua formerly of the Assam Oil Company. It was he who gave us additional information.

This famaily of priests, however, gave up their priesthood and settled another family there and gifted to it all the landed properties which were originally granted to them by the king and shifted to Jorhat in around 1840.

Editor.

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